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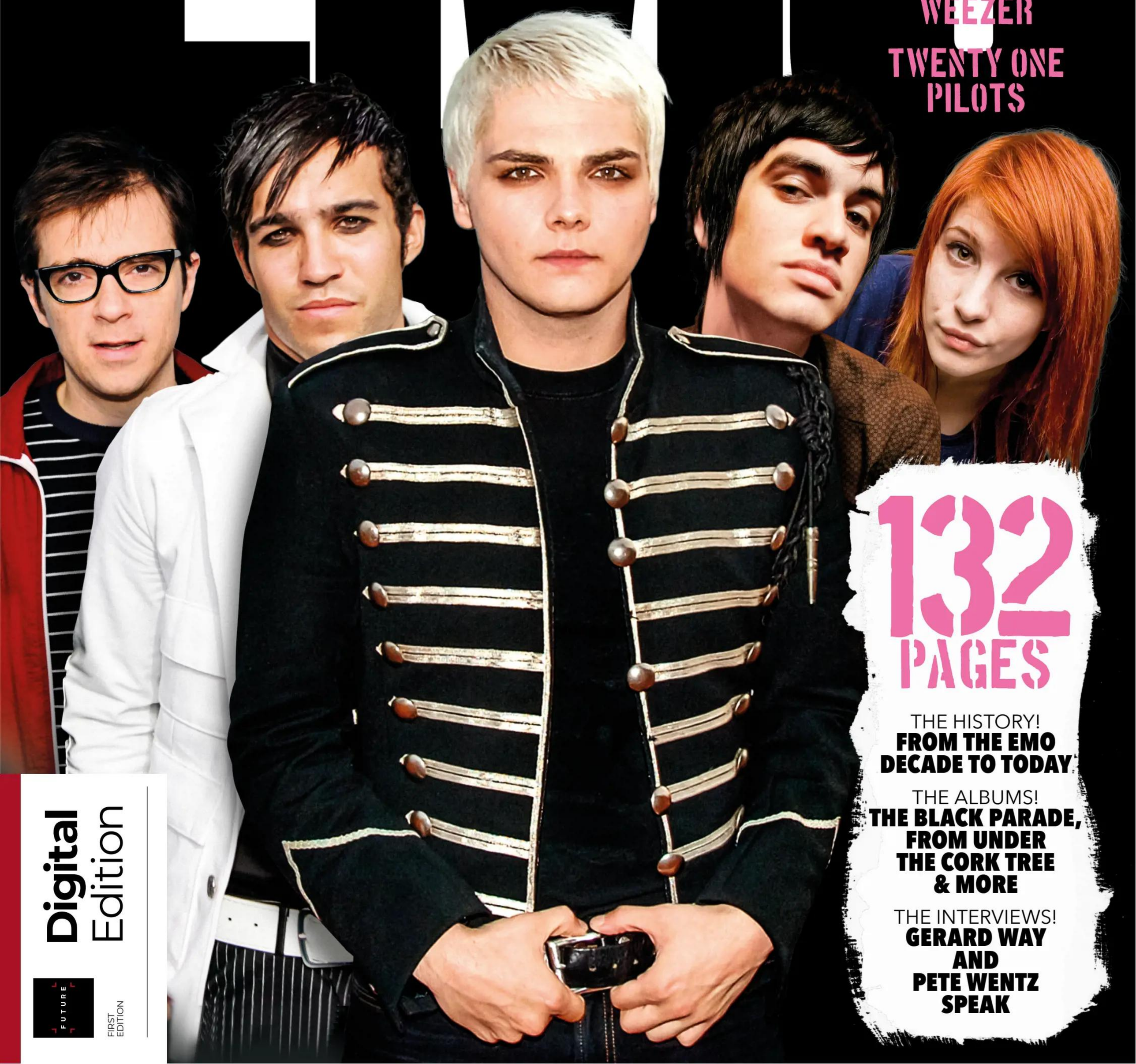

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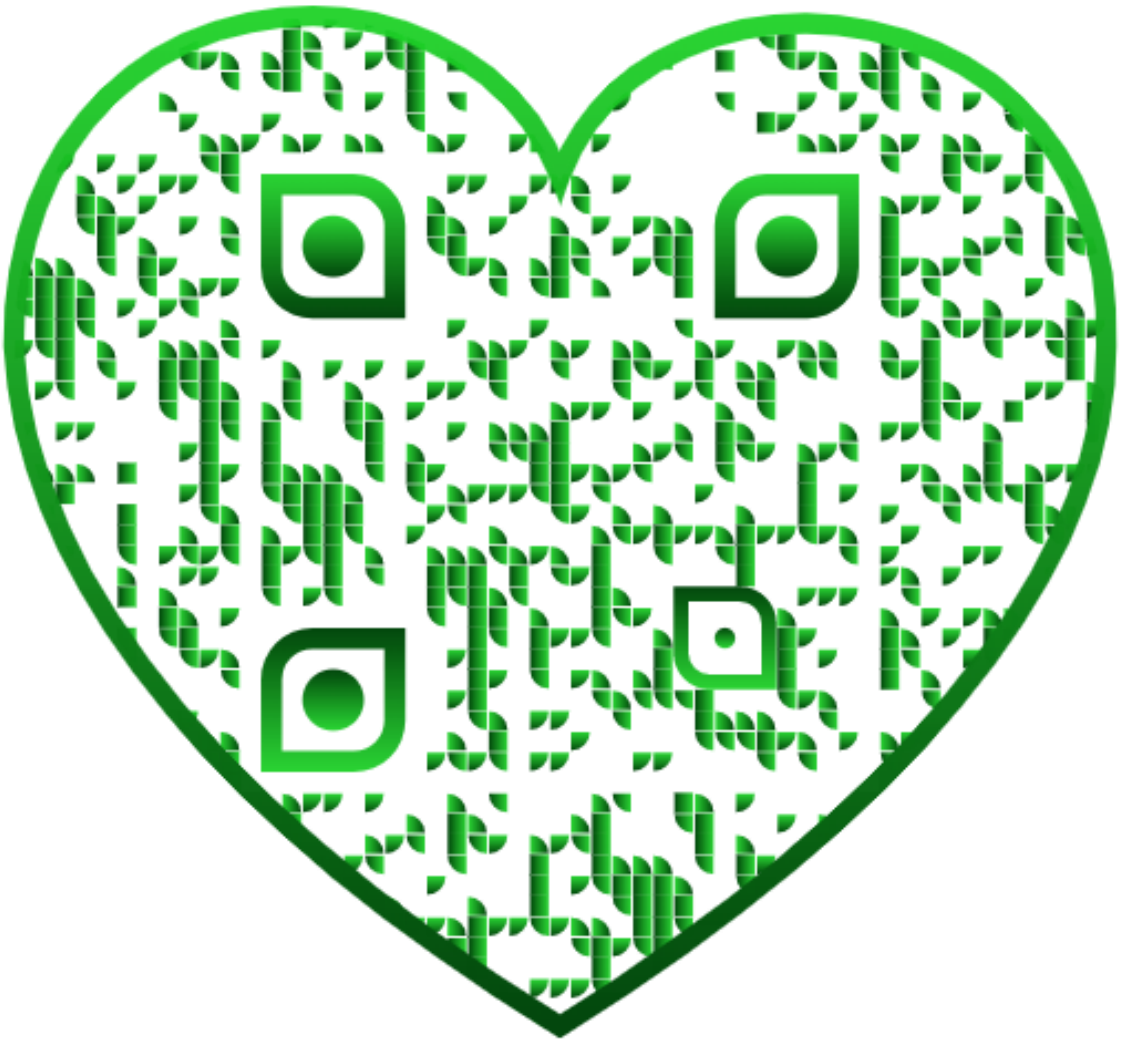

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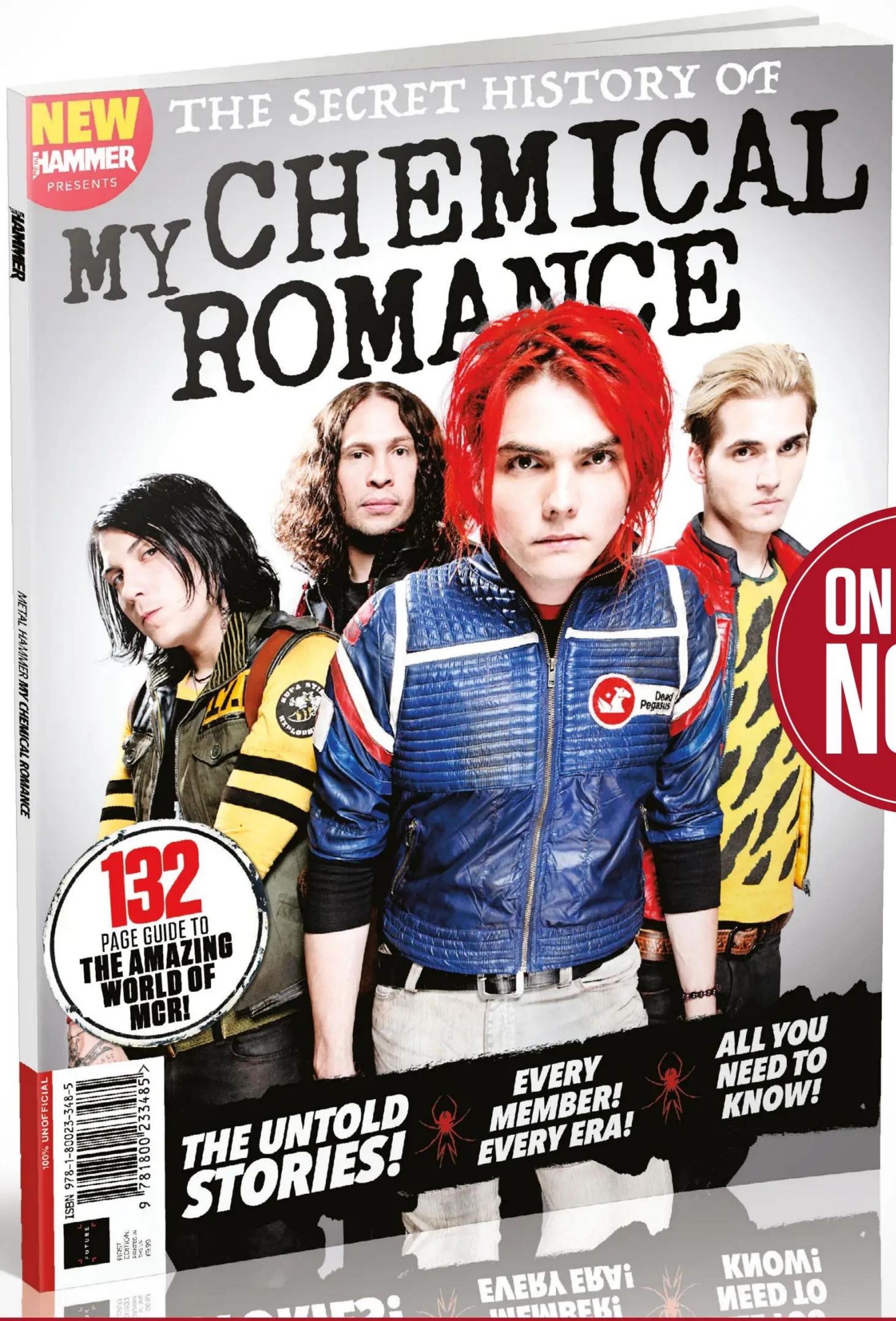

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WHAT IS EMO? Is it My Chemical Romance's thrilling outsider's anthem *I'm Not Okay (I Promise)* or their epic mini-rock opera *Welcome To The Black Parade*? Is it the punk-pop rush of Fall Out Boy's *Sugar, We're Goin' Down*, Panic! At The Disco's high-kicking *I Write Sins Not Tragedies* or Paramore's exhilarating *Misery Business*? Or it the knotted emoting of 80s 'emocore' pioneers Rites Of Spring or the MTV-friendly 90s version purveyed by Weezer or Jimmy Eat World? The simple answer is that it's all of this and more.

This very special 132-page magazine you're holding, brought to you by the people behind *Metal Hammer*, is a celebration of emo in all its angsty, funny, sideswept-fringed glory. Inside, we dive deep into the careers of all the key bands, including MCR, FOB, PATD and Paramore, saluting the songs, albums and people who built the scene. We chart emo's epic rise from the 1980s and 1990s, through the world-dominating 2000s, all up to its current resurgence and huge impact on modern music.

Along the way, you'll find interviews with such emo heroes as My Chemical Romance's Gerard Way, Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz and Panic! At The Disco's Brendon Urie, plus a look at the landmark records and cult classics that have shaped its 40-year journey. So dig out that eyeliner, dust off your leather bracelet and remember: this *is* a scene, not an arms race…

Dave Everley, Editor

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CHAPTER 1

THE 80s & 90s: THE BIRTH OF EMO

When hardcore punk took a turn for the emotional in the mid-80s, no one could have guessed what it would lead to. But the seeds for the entire emo movement were sown right there, in the moshpits of Washington DC, when pioneers such as Rites Of Spring and Embrace dialled down the machismo in favour of something more self-lacerating and honest.

By the 90s, 'emocore' was subtly mutating into emo as we know it, via bands such as Sunny Day Real Estate, Weezer, Jimmy Eat World and countless bands from the American Midwest who brought heart and soul to punk rock. Grunge and then nu metal may have grabbed the magazine covers and MTV airplay, but the new emo movement was quietly but purposefully coming up in the inside lane. And by the end of the decade, it was nearly ready to sweep all before it.

JIM STEINFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

SUNNY DAY REAL ESTATE

EMOTIONAL

RESCUE

Seattle was the home of grunge, but 90s emo pioneers Sunny Day Real Estate offered something grander.

WORDS: DAVID MCLAUGHLIN

CHARLES PETERSON/PRESS

The story of Sunny Day Real Estate is one of serendipity and missed opportunities. In 1992, guitarist/singer Dan Hoerner, drummer William Goldsmith and bassist Nate Mendel were members of Seattle band Empty Set. When Mendel's services were required in Europe for one of his other bands, the remaining pair lucked out when they invited 18-year-old high-schooler Jeremy Enigk to jam with them. Quickly realising the talent they had unearthed, the trio soon became a quartet, changing their name and sound, and installing the precocious Enigk as their new frontman.

It took the newly christened Sunny Day Real Estate just two shows to get signed by Sub Pop, the influential Seattle label who had released early records by Nirvana, Mudhoney Soundgarden and others. Sub Pop co-founder Jonathan Poneman had seen Sunny Day Real Estate play a support slot at local club the Crocodile Café and was blown away.

"The thing that was so emotionally engaging about the music was that the songs were so beautiful and evocative," Poneman later recalled. "It was a riveting experience."

That effect was captured in all its nebulous glory on the band's totemic debut album, *Diary*, released to critical acclaim on May 10, 1994. At odds with still omnipotent grunge scene, it knitted together quiet/loud dynamics,

Sunny Day Real Estate (from left): William Goldsmith, Nate Mendel, Dan Hoerner and Jeremy Enigk. **Opposite:** around the time of *LP2*.

CHARLES PETERSON/PRESS

ethereal vocals, abstract lyrics, and refined hardcore edges. Combined with Chris Thompson's disquieting artwork, the band's refusal to do any press (except for a single interview with British journalist Everett True) and their decision to issue just only one publicity photo only added to their mystique.

"It was like having magical powers, like a weird alchemy," Enigk told *Paste*, reflecting on the record's legacy 30 years later. "We felt like wizards; or I did, anyway."

Despite rock radio support for singles *In Circles* and *Seven*, the album failed to chart, and by the end of the year, frictions were rife. Enigk found God as the band wrapped up the sessions for their second album in Spring 1995. They submitted recordings to Sub Pop without a title and a semi-serious suggestion to make the cover art pink. By the time the album – officially self-titled but unofficially known as *LP2* or 'The Pink Album' – was released in November 1995, Sunny Day Real Estate had already disintegrated.

No less beguiling in hindsight than its predecessor, *LP2* captures a band on the brink of their imminent implosion, wrestling with lo-fi experimentation and pushing ambiguity to whole new levels. It was only in subsequent years that the influence and impact Sunny Day Real Estate made with their first two records would become evident.

After the band split, Nate Mendel and William Goldsmith signed up to the Foo Fighters, though only the former stayed the course. Jeremy Enigk went solo and Dan Hoerner moved to the countryside. When Sub Pop enquired about releasing a posthumous rarities compilation in 1997, the band members began excavating hidden gems, but instead found relations had thawed to the point of giving things a fresh go.

PRESS

DIARY 1994

“WE WERE VERY AWARE OF CREATING SOMETHING THAT DIDN’T SOUND EXACTLY LIKE ANYBODY ELSE.”

DAN HOERNER

The result was 1998’s excellent third album, *How It Feels To Be Something On*, on which Sunny Day Real Estate emerged as a band reborn (albeit without the otherwise engaged Mendel, replaced on record by Jeff Palmer, before Joe Skyward joined the ranks). Songs were grandiose and almost prog-like yet retained the alluring obtusity now firmly established as their signature.

After a live release fulfilled the obligations to Sub Pop, a polished, comparatively underwhelming fourth album, *The Rising Tide*, arrived in 2000. When new label Time Bomb Recordings went bust and funds fell through, the band split a second time.

Side projects, lone ventures, second, third, and fourth reunions have all followed since then. In 2014, new song *Lipton Witch* was released as part of a Record Store Day split 7” with Circa Survive, the last remnant from an abandoned attempt at recording a fifth album at Dave Grohl’s Studio 606 four years prior.

In their absence, countless acts have cited Sunny Day Real Estate as an influential touchstone. Many of the bands on the bills of US festivals Riot Fest and When We Were Young undoubtedly owe much to their imprint. Although SDRE’s legend has grown with the years, the stars have never quite aligned again like they did on that initial sprint.

Emo itself has gone in and out of favour over the course of their on/off career. Despite recoiling at the ‘emo’ label even at the time, in recent years the band members seem to have come around to a place of acceptance and pride about the part they’ve played in pushing alternative music forward.

“We were very aware of creating something that didn’t sound exactly like anybody else,” Hoerner remarked in a 2022 interview with *Spin* magazine. “Now, of course, it sounds like everyone else.”

To this day, *Diary* remains among Sub Pop’s best-selling releases, while its DNA – and that of *LP2* – is seeded in countless bands that have followed them. With a 2024 tour scheduled to mark the 30th anniversary of the debut album, Sunny Day Real Estate appear to be finally enjoying a tangible win – a victory lap three decades in the making.

Released just a month after the death of Kurt Cobain, Sunny Day Real Estate’s 1994 debut album, *Diary*, is both a key staging post in the development of the 1990s emo scene and a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

Across its 11 tracks, the Seattle quartet are busy: busy eschewing convention, busy defying their place and time… busy in every conceivable way. It’s a busy record musically, too, as propulsive, winding opener *Seven* proves, springing from the traps. William Goldsmith’s drums clatter in tandem with Nate Mendel’s lolloping basslines, while guitars alternate between delicately pirouetting riffs and power chord muscle. Then there’s the distinctive, elastic voice of Jeremy Enigk, stretching around such wilfully inscrutable lines as, *‘December’s tragic drive, when time is poetry.’* That’s all within the first minute.

On the plaintive *In Circles*, dynamics shift between soft and sparse to rousing spirals of sound. Elsewhere, it’s anyone’s guess if *Song About An Angel* is about an angel or not, which may well be the point. *Diary* invites listeners to unspool songs like puzzles, leaving breadcrumb trails of suggestion, way pointed by the obvious emotions on show and the promise of depths to discover, if you put the work in. Perhaps that’s why *The Blankets Were The Stairs* is all clamour and chaos one minute, as Enigk shrieks and screams, pushing his voice to the cusp of cracking, before slipping into something more dreamlike and serene. It’s all so odd. And when you think you’ve figured it out, *Pheurton Skeurto* comes along, winding an eerie course through proceedings like a borderline Vaudevillian interlude.

There’s a reason this record has found a receptive audience for three decades and continues to enthral new generations who find something inexplicably personal reflected back in the abstraction. *Diary* stands up because it exists in a wonderfully weird universe all of its own creation, evoking a timelessness rarely heard on record, then or since.

BLUE POWER

They were the nerds made good who helped shape modern emo – but Weezer and stardom didn't mix.

WORDS: DAVID MCLAUGHLIN

When Weezer emerged onto the mid-90s alt-rock scene, many people suspiciously wondered if they might be an industry plant. That's how perfectly formed the quartet were when they released their self-titled debut album – aka the Blue Album, on account of the background colour of its cover – in the summer of 1994.

What people didn't see were the years of struggle that preceded it. For frontman Rivers Cuomo, in particular, there had been a rocky road paved with pitfalls on the way towards MTV ubiquity. When he upped sticks from Connecticut to Los Angeles in 1990, he was a 19-year-old long-haired shredder who wanted to be the next Yngwie Malmsteen.

He'd tried and failed to get a record deal with a succession of bands – Avant Garde, Zoom, Sixty Wrong Sausages Fuzz – before cutting all his hair off and embracing his true nerd self, empowered by a bespectacled Kurt Cobain in Nirvana's *In Bloom* video. Two break-ups had made life a drag, and his day job at Tower Records wasn't exactly what he had in mind when he took that leap of faith to follow his dreams. Even the first Weezer show, on March 19, 1994, was a bummer: performing late, they watched as a crowd of cooing fans abruptly left after Keanu Reeves' grunge trio Dogstar wrapped up their set.

But when a demo containing an early version of *Say It Ain't So* found its way into the hands of Geffen A&R executive Todd Sullivan, everything changed. Hearing enough promise to sign the band almost immediately, he paired them up with The Cars frontman Ric Ocasek to help hone the signature sound that would launch Weezer to stardom. Guided by Ocasek's songwriting and production nous, plus a little creative direction courtesy of bassist Matt Sharp, they soon struck gold.

"[Matt said] 'Let's not be grunge. Let's be more like the Beach Boys, but loud,'" drummer Pat Wilson recalled in *Rolling Stone*.

That combination crystalised in instantly catchy hooks, lyrics that were both confessional and self-deprecating, and just

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

“I SERIOUSLY THOUGHT WE WERE THE NEXT NIRVANA – A SUPER IMPORTANT, HEARTBREAKING HEAVY ROCK BAND.”

RIVERS CUOMO

Left: Rivers Cuomo shredding in 1995. **Below:** Cuomo and guitarist Brian Bell relaxing offstage.

FAR L EFT: TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY KARJEAN LEVINE/GETTY IMAGES

enough effects pedal crunch to make its mark on a slew of hit singles. The ingenious, Spike Jonze-directed video for *Buddy Holly* – super-imposing the band on the set of '70s sitcom *Happy Days* – catapuled Weezer into the hearts and homes of mainstream music fans. Of course, when he finally found fame, Cuomo realised how much he hated it. The disparity between his view of the band and the wider world's stung, too.

"I seriously thought we were the next Nirvana," he told writer Brian Hiatt. "And I thought the world was going to perceive us that way, like a super important, super powerful, heartbreaking heavy rock band, and as serious artists. That's how I saw us."

Embittered and burnt out on touring, he enrolled in Harvard to study classical composition. He grew a long beard and hobbled around campus assisted by a cane, the result of surgery to correct a lifelong issue with his left leg. Between studies, he wrote songs about how miserable he felt and the pain he was in. They would ultimately become the band's second album, *Pinkerton*, a game-changing yet stark departure from the largely upbeat power-pop of their debut. The world of 1996 wasn't ready for it.

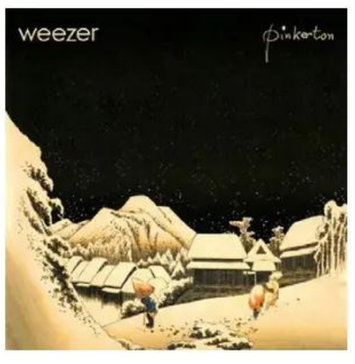
Upon release, the record was met with mixed reviews as critics and fans wanting another Blue Album felt short-changed by this dark, raw and unpolished version of the band. *Rolling Stone* readers voted it the third worst album of the year.

It was through those songs, however, that Weezer launched countless future emo careers. Its caustic, abrasive blueprint became the stuff of legend and fuelled years of debate online. But the negative reactions cut Cuomo even deeper, causing the frontman to periodically disown it, telling *Entertainment Weekly* that it was "a hugely painful mistake". His complicated relationship with the record would only deepen as it found new audiences and a growing cult appreciation over the years. By 2009 he had softened, telling Pitchfork he found it, "super-deep, brave, and authentic."

Post-*Pinkerton*, Weezer went on hiatus, Matt Sharp left the band, and with Mikey Welsh on bass, their 2001 comeback album (once again self-titled, but unofficially named 'Green') relaunched them back into favour with fans who felt frosty towards its predecessor. 2002's *Maladroit* introduced Scott Shriner on bass and from that point on, the line-up has remained rock solid ever since. What hasn't been so reliable is the band's relentlessly prolific output, which has ranged from the near-sublime (2016's White album, 2014's *Everything Will Be Alright In The End*) to the downright stinky (take your pick).

Even at their best, however, nothing has really come as close to the greatness touched on those first two albums. Over the course of their career, Weezer have admirably outrun their critics, regular reinventing themselves and inspiring countless artists, contributing at least two bona fide alt-rock classics along the way. Their legacy may not be perfect, but for a few years, the band who seemed too good to be true almost managed it.

WEEZER 1995
PINKERTON 1997



Weezer's influence on emo cannot be overstated, thanks to the groundwork laid down by the band's first two albums. Blending power pop, alternative rock and big-haired heavy metal influences into a proprietary concoction, the quartet's self-titled 1994 debut – aka the Blue Album – offered a timely antithesis to the default gloom of grunge, boasting a freshness that stands the test of time thanks in part to Ric Ocasek's sparkling production, but is mostly down to Rivers Cuomo's songwriting.

On tracks such as *Only In Dreams* and *Undone – The Sweater Song*, they turn heartbreak into radio-friendly earworms, but there's more to it than mere angst. Though the cultural references – Kiss, Buddy Holly, comic book superhero Kitty Pryde – might suggest sophomoric fare, when Cuomo sings about alcoholism and familial issues on *Say It Ain't So*, the seeds of what would come next were sown.

If the debut wears its geek-rock heart on its sleeve, *Pinkerton* puts the subsequent shattered pieces on display for all the world to see two years later. Written in the depths of Cuomo's quarter-life breakdown, having grown disillusioned with rock stardom, the material is darker still with a brooding sonic edge to match. In place of the debut's sheen comes a live, spatially tangible punch – check out those drums on opener, *Tired Of Sex*.

Through a loosely conceptual riff on his obsession with Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* opera, Cuomo wrote songs of self-loathing, sharing even the most questionable of innermost thoughts as part of his lyrical bloodletting. Though time hasn't been kind to all of it (the fetishistic gaze of *Across The Sea*, for one, sounds less than appealing almost 30 years on), *Pinkerton* remains a problematic masterwork. The great shame of its initial flop goes beyond its chief architect's mixed feelings after the fact. Although cult classic status eventually followed and other artists grabbed the baton, the fallout from the experience stopped Weezer ever being so vulnerable again.

MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES

PHOENIX NIGHTS

Arizona's Jimmy Eat World were the bridge between emo's old and new schools – and in *Clarity* and *Bleed American*, they made two classics of the genre.

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

'Hey, don't write yourself off yet...' The lyrics to *The Middle* – Jimmy Eat World's breakthrough hit and an absolute emo anthem – might have been intended as words of encouragement to a teenage punk struggling with ideas of self-worth and acceptance, but they could equally have applied to the band's own career as they entered a new century.

Throughout the mid-to-late 90s, the quartet werea a cult act who had garnered a little airplay on US college radio before being unceremoniously ditched by their label. Their third album in particular, 1999's *Clarity*, would eventually come to be viewed as an emo classic but at the time it was considered a commercial flop.

As the band took on day jobs to self-fund the follow up, they looked as likely to crew the next manned space flight to the Moon as break into the musical mainstream. But bolstered by the huge success of *The Middle*, 2001's *Bleed American* changed all that. It wasn't just a massive album for Jimmy Eat World, it blew the doors wide open for every other emotionally charged rock and punk band to follow.

When Jimmy Eat World formed in Mesa, Arizona in 1993, they had no such grand ambitions. "Our goals were really small when we first started," guitarist and original lead vocalist Tom Linton told *Columbus Underground*. "We just wanted to put out a little seven-inch and we were freaking out about that. And be able to go to California, you know – leave Phoenix to play a show outside of Arizona."

They soon went beyond such modest aspirations with debut EP *One, Two, Three, Four* and a self-titled full-length album, both released in 1994 on local label Wooden Blue Records. Their early material was more in the vein of ramshackle skate-punk and it wasn't until their second album, 1996's *Static Prevails*, that they started to hone their sound into a more refined format. Lead guitarist Jim Adkins started to take on more of the lead vocals, adding his crystalline highs to Linton's Jawbox-style rasps, and they brought in more

"*CLARITY* GREW INTO WHAT IT IS NOW, BUT THAT WASN'T THE CASE BACK THEN. IT MADE SENSE TO NOT SPEND ANY MORE MONEY ON US."

JIM ADKINS ➤

MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES X2

post-hardcore and emo elements. They were signed to Capitol Records on a development deal, which guaranteed one album and gave the label the option for several more, and things appeared to be looking rosy.

In the wake of Green Day's *Dookie* though, major labels weren't looking for bands who could slowly develop their own sound and fanbase. They wanted big returns quickly, and when *Static Prevails* failed to shift the units, the band already started to see the writing on the wall.

"We approached making [follow-up album *Clarity*] like we would never get a chance to make another record in an actual studio again," Adkins told the *Washed Up Emo* podcast. "So we did go kinda nuts…like: 'Alright, today we're renting timpani!"

The album certainly had its grandiose elements, with a strings, keys, piano, bells and a vibraphone, but there was also the more personal, relatable side that has always been such a key part of emo's appeal.

Clarity's lead single *Lucky Denver Mint* gained some traction and remains a fan favourite to this day, but the album again failed to match their record label paymasters' expectations. When Capitol decided not to renew the contract, the band were philosophical.

"All big labels are extremely adept at pushing bands that are moving 20,000 or more records a week," Jim Adkins told *Spin*. "Capitol knew exactly what to do with that. But they had no idea what to do with bands like us that sold 10,000 copies between all releases. [*Clarity*] grew over time into what it is now, but that wasn't the case back then. It made complete business sense to not spend any more money on us."

Above: Jimmy Eat World live in 2001. **Below:** frontman Jim Adkins (left) with Tenacious D singer and actor Jack Black.

Jimmy Eat World were down but certainly not out. Regrouping for the next step, they channelled money from their day jobs and touring that had stepped up a level. Adkins recalled Tom Linton sitting in a bar nervously clutching a backpack with $35,000 in it because they didn't want to leave it in the car and couldn't deposit so much in the bank in one go.

Producer Mark Trombino agreed to work on the album that would become *Bleed American*, with the band paying him when they could, going back on tour to raise funds as needed.

"It turned out to be one of my favourite record-making experiences because it was literally me and four guys just making a record together without any label involvement," Trombino told *Entertainment Weekly*. "That was the reason it turned out the way it did."

As they worked on the album, new record labels sniffed around and the band eventually signed with DreamWorks Records. *Bleed American* was released in July 2001 (the title was temporarily changed to *Jimmy Eat World* in the wake of the September 11

L. COHEN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

attacks). It featured a more streamlined, accessible sound and *The Middle* was its most anthemic moment. Written in direct response to a fan who contacted them on their AOL account, it featured a dream sequence video in which the protagonist shows up to a party fully clothed, while his peers all dance in their underwear.

"I think we just decided, 'Let's lean into this and do it and make sure it's done right', make sure it's not overly gratuitous or inappropriate in a way that feels creepy," drummer Zach Lind told Grammy.com.

The video was a hit and they toured relentlessly on the back of it, including stints on the Warped Tour and the Pop Disaster tour with Blink-182 and Green Day. By the time they came up for air, this most unassuming of bands were rock stars with a million-selling album behind them.

"The way that *Bleed American* just opened doors for us was maybe one of the most satisfying experiences of my life," Lind told Grammy.com. "In the wake of all the frustration and banging our head against the wall at Capitol, it just felt like everything aligned perfectly, and I think we were lucky to be able to experience that in that way, because I don't think a lot of people get that moment in their life."

Jimmy Eat World at the KROQ Weenie Roast in 2002: (from left) Zach Lind, Rick Burch, Tom Linton and Jim Adkins.

It didn't only open doors for the band who made it but for the scene as a whole, ushering emo into the mainstream spotlight. It also set up Jimmy Eat World as global stars who would outlive the musical and cultural wave they helped to generate. They would never match *Bleed American* sales-wise, but follow-up *Futures* went Gold and 2007's *Chase This Light* would become their highest charting album, peaking at No.5 in the US Billboard 200. They would continue to release a string of consistent and highly regarded albums over subsequent years.

With no splits or lengthy hiatuses, they're one of the few major players of the 2000s emo boom who haven't had to affect a reunion to benefit from the recent resurgence of interest, supporting a revitalized My Chemical Romance in Australia and touring with Fall Out Boy in the US. They might dispute the term but Jimmy Eat World remain emo royalty and their legacy is assured.

"THE WAY THAT *BLEED AMERICAN* OPENED DOORS FOR US WAS MAYBE ONE OF THE MOST SATISFYING EXPERIENCES OF MY LIFE."

ZACH LIND

JIMMY EAT WORLD

STATIC PREVAILS 1996 CLARITY 1999 BLEED AMERICAN 2001

The trio of albums which showed emo was a force to be reckoned with.

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

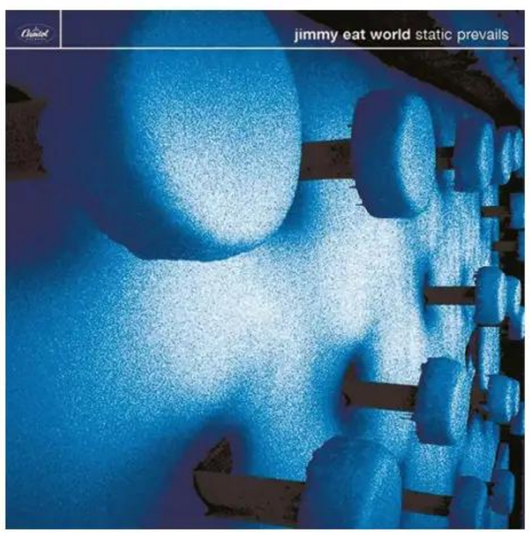
Static Prevails was the start of a three-album trajectory that would transform Jimmy Eat World from raggedy Arizona skate punks into a revered band at the vanguard of the 2000s emo revolution.

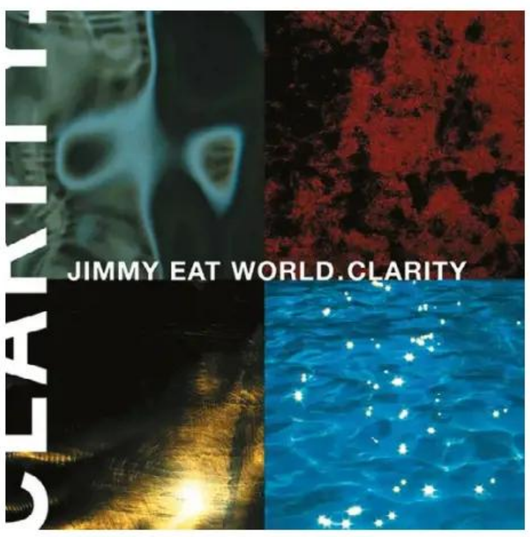
The band's self-titled 1994 debut sounds like an outlier today, but it was follow-up *Static Prevails* – released in 1996 on major label Capitol – which was where things began to heat up for Jimmy Eat World. The album features a more or less even vocal split between guitarists Tom Linton and Jim Adkins – the pair combine on opener *Thinking, That's All* and *Call It In The Air*, but for the most part it's one or the other taking the lead, providing different dynamics via Linton's gruffer delivery and Adkins' higher range as they weave through the songs. Musically there's also a constant ebb and flow between the heavier post-hardcore moments gleaned from contemporaries like Sense Field and Sunny Day Real Estate.

By 1999's *Clarity*, Adkins was their first-choice vocalist, giving full rein to his melodic versatility. Fearing it would be their last album on a major label, they threw everything at it in terms of instrumentation, not cluttering individual songs but ensuring that they could follow any creative idea they had. The album opens with the single sustained organ note that ushers in *Table For Glasses*, and elsewhere there are cellos and violins adding additional layers and texture to songs that sound meticulously crafted, but they also know when to dial it back and rely on simplicity.

The deliciously subtle power-pop of *Lucky Denver Mint* provided the band with their first minor hit (it should arguably have been bigger, despite being used in the Drew Barrymore rom-com *Never Been Kissed*).

"*BLEED AMERICAN* WAS BOLDER AND BRASHER THAN ITS PREDECESSORS, WITH A POP-ROCK SENSE OF IMMEDIACY."





MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES

It couldn't generate the sales Capitol demanded, though and, while *Clarity* was an artistic triumph that would eventually be recognised as a classic, it was largely overlooked at the time.

The approach for the initially self-funded *Bleed American* was entirely different. "I started recognizing that simpler construction, simpler arrangements, the everything-you-need/nothing-you-don't type of songwriting is actually really, really challenging and worth pursuing," Adkins told Grammy.com.

That's not to say that *Bleed American* lacks subtlety or experimentation but it's bolder and brasher than its predecessors, with a pop-rock sense of immediacy. There are certainly no 16-minute epics like *Clarity*'s sprawling *Goodbye Sky Harbor*. Instead, songs such the title track and *Get It Faster* are relatively simple riff-driven groovers while *A Praise Chorus* and aptly-titled *Clarity* refugee *Sweetness* tap into the pop-punk zeitgeist with gusto and, in the latter case, a welter of *'Woah-oh'* hooks. And then there's *The Middle*, a singalong anthem of self-belief and perseverance that became a hit.

There was more to come with 2004's darker *Futures* but it was these three releases which turned Jimmy Eat World into unlikely stars and helped usher in a new emo era.

THE KEY ALBUMS

STATIC PREVAILS

Released: June 1996
Personnel: Jim Adkins (vocals/guitar), Tom Linton (vocals/guitar), Rick Burch (bass), Zach Lind (drums)
Peak chart position: did not chart
Tracklisting:
Thinking, That's All
Rockstar
Claire
Call It In The Air
Seventeen
Episode IV
Digits
Caveman
World Is Static
In The Same Room
Robot Factory
Anderson Mesa

CLARITY

Released: February 1993
Personnel: Jim Adkins, Tom Linton, Rick Burch, Zach Lind
Peak chart position: did not chart
Tracklisting:
Table For Glasses
Lucky Denver Mint
Your New Aesthetic
Believe in What You Want
A Sunday
Crush
12.23.95
Ten
Just Watch The Fireworks
For Me This Is Heaven
Blister
Clarity
Goodbye Sky Harbor

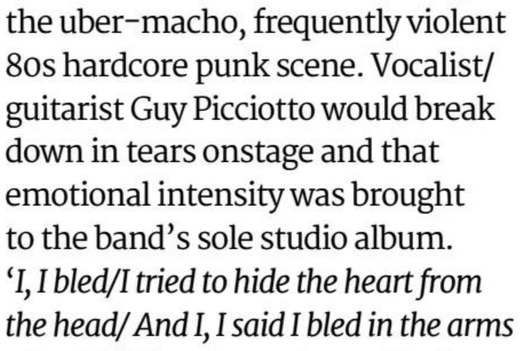
BLEED AMERICAN

Released: July 2001
Personnel: Jim Adkins, Tom Linton, Rick Burch, Zach Lind
Peak chart position: No.62 (UK), No. 31 (US)
Tracklisting:
Bleed American
A Praise Chorus
The Middle
Your House
Sweetness
Hear You Me
If You Don't, Don't
Get It Faster
Cautioners
The Authority Song
My Sundown

ESSENTIAL 80S & 90S EMO ALBUMS

The foundations on which the modern emo scene was built.

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS



RITES OF SPRING

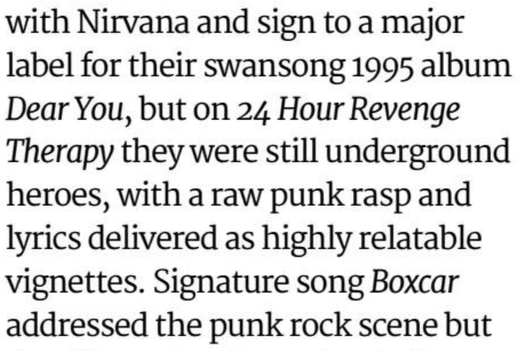
Rites Of Spring (1985)

This is where it all began. Rites Of Spring brought deeply personal lyrics and a sense of vulnerability to the uber-macho, frequently violent 80s hardcore punk scene. Vocalist/guitarist Guy Picciotto would break down in tears onstage and that emotional intensity was brought to the band's sole studio album. *'I, I bled/I tried to hide the heart from the head/ And I, I said I bled in the arms of a girl I'd barely met,'* sang Picciotto with a strained howl on *For Want Of*. Emotional hardcore or emocore – the direct precursor of emo – was suddenly a thing.

EMBRACE

Embrace (1987)

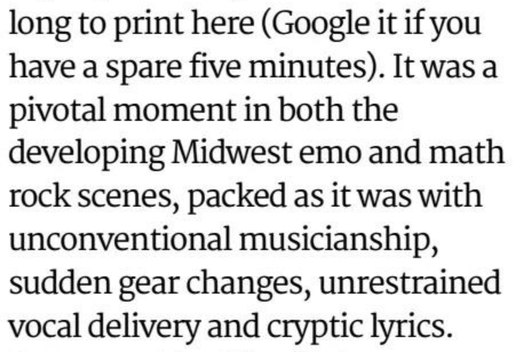
The other pioneering emocore band of the 80s was the short-lived Embrace, fronted by ex-Minor Threat frontman Ian MacKaye. Like Rites Of Spring, Embrace were as bruised as they were bruising, with a measured, melodic take on hardcore and a willingness to shine a light internally. Their only album emerged posthumously, after MacKaye and Guy Picciotto had formed influential post-hardcore outfit Fugazi. Still, their legacy remains huge – you can draw a skewed line from here to emo bands of the 2000s and beyond.



JAWBREAKER

24 Hour Revenge Therapy (1994)

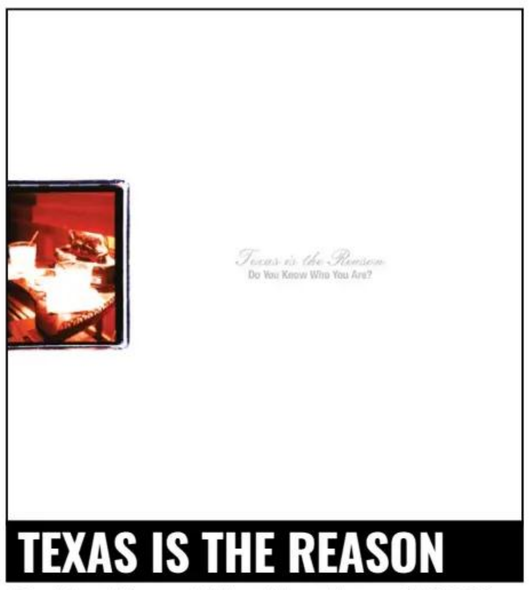
By the mid-90s, grunge and pop-punk had reshaped the landscape. Jawbreaker would tour with Nirvana and sign to a major label for their swansong 1995 album *Dear You*, but on *24 Hour Revenge Therapy* they were still underground heroes, with a raw punk rasp and lyrics delivered as highly relatable vignettes. Signature song *Boxcar* addressed the punk rock scene but the album also charted a single relationship experienced by frontman Blake Schwarzenbach – the aftermath of which would be dissected on *Dear You*.



CAP'N JAZZ

Shmap'n Shmazz (1995)

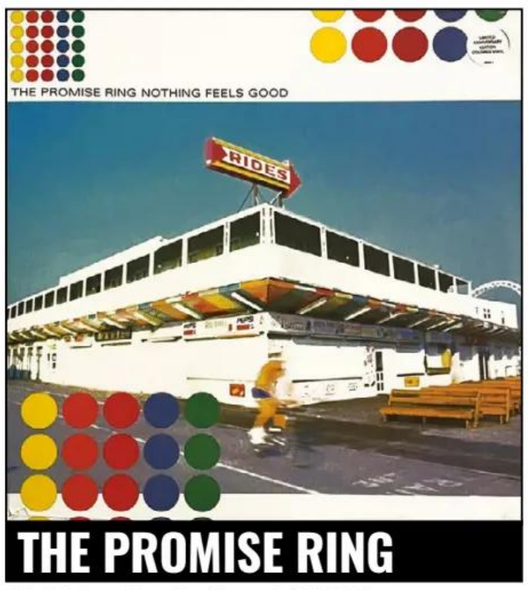
Although generally referred to as *Shmap'n Shmazz*, the full title of Cap'n Jazz's only album is way too long to print here (Google it if you have a spare five minutes). It was a pivotal moment in both the developing Midwest emo and math rock scenes, packed as it was with unconventional musicianship, sudden gear changes, unrestrained vocal delivery and cryptic lyrics. Frontman Tim Kinsella later revealed that 90 per cent of the latter "were written in one night the first time I took mushrooms and sat by a campfire."



TEXAS IS THE REASON

Do You Know Who You Are? (1996)

Texas Is The Reason are yet another band who were massively influential despite only managing to record a single full-length album. Taking its title from the last words that John Lennon reportedly heard before his death, *Do You Know Who You Are?* melded emo earnestness with a pop-punk sense of tongue-in-cheek fun, partly fuelled by a preoccupation with conspiracy theories. There's a hint of angular post-hardcore softened by melody, making it an exemplar of mid-90s second wave emo.



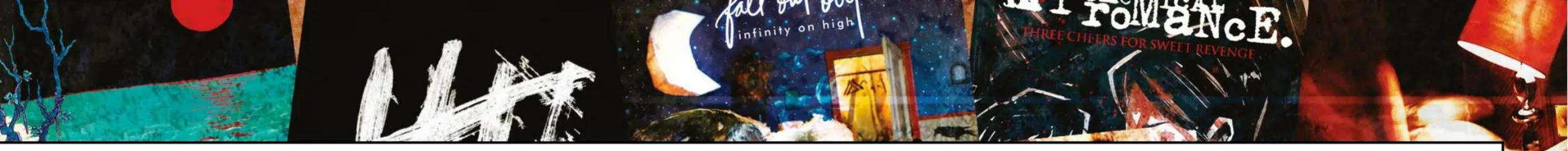
THE PROMISE RING

Nothing Feels Good (1997)

Building on the chaotic splurge of singer/guitarist Davey von Bohlen's former outfit Cap'n Jazz (his tenure in the two bands overlapped), The Promise Ring smoothed off a lot of the rough edges and added infectious power-pop influences. They were one of the first bands to embrace pop hooks, prepping emo for a more radio-friendly 2000s incarnation. The pure emo title of their second album was also lifted for Andy Greenwald's essential 2003 book *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers And Emo*.

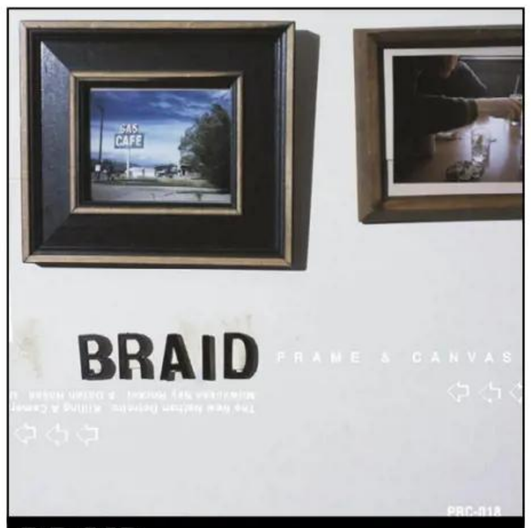
The Get Up Kids: 'bridging the gap between emo and slightly wonky pop-punk.'

PETER PAKVIS/REDFERNS/GETTY



Braid: linchpins of the Midwest emo scene.

MITCH WOCJIK/PRESS



BRAID

Frame and Canvas (1998)

The members of Braid bonded over a shared love of Rites Of Spring and Embrace. Their first two albums, 1995's *Frankie Welfare Boy Age 5* and 1996's *The Age Of Octeen*, were love letters to 80s emocore, but by *Frame And Canvas* the Illinois band had developed their own style. They retained unconventional rhythms but stirred in roughshod hooks for a challenging yet accessible album that become a linchpin of Midwest emo and established their label, Polyvinyl Records, as a major player in the scene.

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

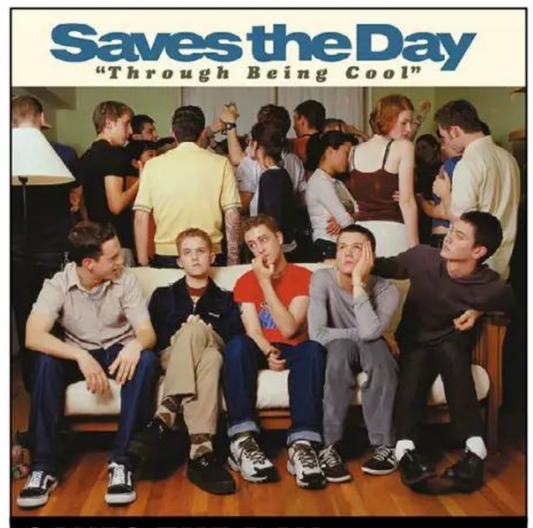
American Football (1999)

Illinois' American Football followed right behind Braid on Polyvinyl with an album that would become an instant classic. Frontman Mike Kinsella was yet another Cap'n Jazz alumnus, but American Football were a very different proposition to his former band, offering a subtler, more lilting and largely acoustic soundtrack to complement the melancholy, world-weary lyrics. There's a jazz-like use of space and a hypnotic quality to intricate guitar lines that never fail to strike the right emotional chords.

THE GET UP KIDS

Something To Write Home About (1999)

Kansas City's The Get Up Kids drew up their own blueprint on revered 1997 debut album *Four Minute Mile* but follow-up *Something To Write Home About* was a more polished affair that propelled them towards the big leagues, Lyrically, it's an album that wallows and mopes – not least on album opener and classic break-up song *Holiday* – but it's all set to an incongruously joyous and high-energy soundtrack that bridges the gap between emo and slightly wonky pop-punk.



SAVES THE DAY

Through Being Cool (1999)

Their legacy has been sullied by allegations of sexual misconduct against frontman Chis Conley, but Saves The Day helped open the floodgates for that blurring of the emo and pop-punk lines that would wash through 2000s. There's rampant melodic hardcore on their second album, but it's the infectious hooks that stand out. Bonus points for *Shoulder To The Wheel* – emo is centred around emotional honesty, but few artists have actually written a song about how much they miss their mum.

CHAPTER 2

THE 2000s: WELCOME TO THE BLACK PARADE

The 2000s started out as the Nu Metal Decade, dominated by bands such as Korn and Limp Bizkit. But nothing lasts forever, and within a few years men in red baseball caps, baggy jeans and wallet chains had been swept aside by the emo revolution.

Noughties trailblazers My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy and, later, Panic! At The Disco and Paramore hitched emo's heart-on-sleeve lyrical approach to pop-punk's sense of melody, throwing in songtitles that looked like they'd swallowed a dictionary for good measure. The whole world fell head over heels for it. There were massive pop crossover hits, epic concept albums about vampires and rock operas about dying hospital patients, tabloid panics and all manner of award show madness. Suddenly, sideswept fringes, leather wristbands and guyliner were everywhere you looked.

After building for nearly 20 years, emo had finally arrived. And it wasn't going anywhere any time soon.

JIM STEINFELDT/GETTY IMAGES

BOB LEVEY/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

THE EMO DECADE

The emo scene began the 2000s as a fringe concern. Within a few years, it had become the soundtrack to a generation.

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

As the 21st century dawned, emo didn't look likely to become the next musical and cultural phenomenon. Grunge and alt-rock had dominated the 90s while nu-metal and pop-punk still loomed large at the change of the millennium. Emo had its adherents but, even as certain strands adopted poppier elements, it was still an underground scene. Weezer had enjoyed some success but the likes of The Promise Ring and Saves The Day were selling records in the tens rather than hundreds of thousands.

Then came Jimmy Eat World. Having been ditched by their label Columbia when 1999's now-revered *Clarity* failed to live up to commercial expectations, they decided to fund themselves and came out swinging with 2001 follow-up *Bleed American*. They chose the title-track as the lead-off single, only to watch as it "fell from the face of the Earth", according to drummer Tom Lind, in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

The band hastily renamed the album *Jimmy Eat World* and released outsider anthem *The Middle* as the next single. The striking video, which cleverly mixed allegory and semi-nudity, took up residency on MTV and the band ended up presenting it to mainstream national audiences on hugely popular such as *Late Night With O'Brien*, *The Tonight Show* and *Saturday Night Live*. Their profile was given a further boost via tours with the likes of Weezer and with Green Day and Blink-182 on the Pop Disaster Tour.

"It felt… like we were totally getting away with something: 'This isn't real. We're just taking the ride for the funny stories while we have the chance,'" Jimmy Eat World

"WE TALKED ABOUT PLAYING IN FRONT OF A GIANT BANNER THAT SAID 'EMO'. YOU MIGHT AS WELL BE IN ON THE JOKE."

PETE WENTZ

Left: Ryan Ross and Brendon Urie of Panic! At The Disco. **Right:** Dashboard Confessional's Chris Carrabba. **Below right:** MCR in their Black Parade pomp.

"KIDS ARE SMART. THEY GET SICK OF BEING FORCE-FED CRAP, AND THEIR FORM OF REBELLION IS TO FIND STUFF THAT ISN'T LIKE THAT."

RICH EGAN, VAGRANT RECORDS

singer Jim Adkins told Grammy.com. "It didn't sink in that, 'Oh, wait, this is actually connecting with people. This is something that is really getting out there.'"

While Jimmy Eat World's momentum was nearly stalled by the 9/11 attacks, some felt that this pivotal moment in world history would also pave the way for a new, more emotional wave of music to take centre stage.

In Chris Payne's book *Where Are Your Boys Tonight? The Oral History of Emo's Mainstream Explosion*, Senses Fail frontman Buddy Nielsen explained: "One reason I think 2000s emo got so big was because it was kind of inappropriate to have party music as the background to two wars and probably the deadliest terrorist attack in American history. The response was music that captured the energy of the youth, which was this fucked-up world we're living in."

My Chemical Romance's Gerard Way decided to follow his dreams of being in a band after witnessing the 9/11 attacks on New York first-hand, watching it unfold from across the Hudson River. "I literally said to myself, 'Fuck art. I've gotta get out of the basement. I've gotta see the world. I've gotta make a difference'," he told *Spin* magazine.

The other pivotal releases of the very early 2000s were Dashboard Confessional's *The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most* and, to a lesser degree, *Stay What You Are* by Saves The Day. Both emerged in 2001 on Vagrant Records. The label would play a huge part in emo's success and that year they put on the Vagrant Across America tour, featuring every band on their roster – also including Alkaline Trio, Get Up Kids, The Anniversary, Hey Mercedes and more.

"Kids are smart," Vagrant co-founder Rich Egan said. "They get sick of being force-fed

crap, and their form of rebellion is to find stuff that isn't like that… if you give them the opportunity to discover a great band that isn't on MTV or radio all day, they will."

Of course, a little MTV and radio exposure didn't hurt the leading lights of the scene and by 2002 Dashboard Confessional and Jimmy Eat World were on the way to gold and platinum albums respectively – a feat that was even more impressive considering file-sharing services such as LimeWire and Napster had already started to bite at record sales.

Emo was slowly gripping the mainstream market and even the teen mag *Seventeen* got in the act, with an 'Am I emo?' style guide for its teenage readers. Interestingly, this time capsule of a piece highlights geeky glasses, too-small sweaters and clunky shoes as must-haves items, showing that the emo aesthetic of the time was still more 'Rivers Cuomo' than the swept-fringe scene kid look that would eventually come to be associated with the movement.

Another huge moment came at the tail-end of 2002, when Dashboard Confessional followed in Nirvana's footsteps to record an MTV Unplugged show. At that point they were the first band without a platinum album to do so – although the resulting live album *MTV Unplugged 2.0* achieved that status itself. Speaking to *The Ringer*, frontman Chris Carrabba described the surreal experience of a band with punk roots being taken to Diesel for free clothes and provided with better guitars by Gibson. He also recalled grabbing a badge to wear to show support for cult emo outfit The Anniversary – one of the first bands that had helped Dashboard out.

KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

"I grabbed that pin and put it on my strap just as a way to make sure they understood I was really grateful," Carrabba explained. "We were all, as a scene, in this rapid succession. First it was me, and then My Chem, and Fall Out Boy, and there were a lot of chips that would fall. We just all—especially those earliest bands—really tried hard to understand that we're a community with or without commercial success."

LEFT: JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS/GETTY

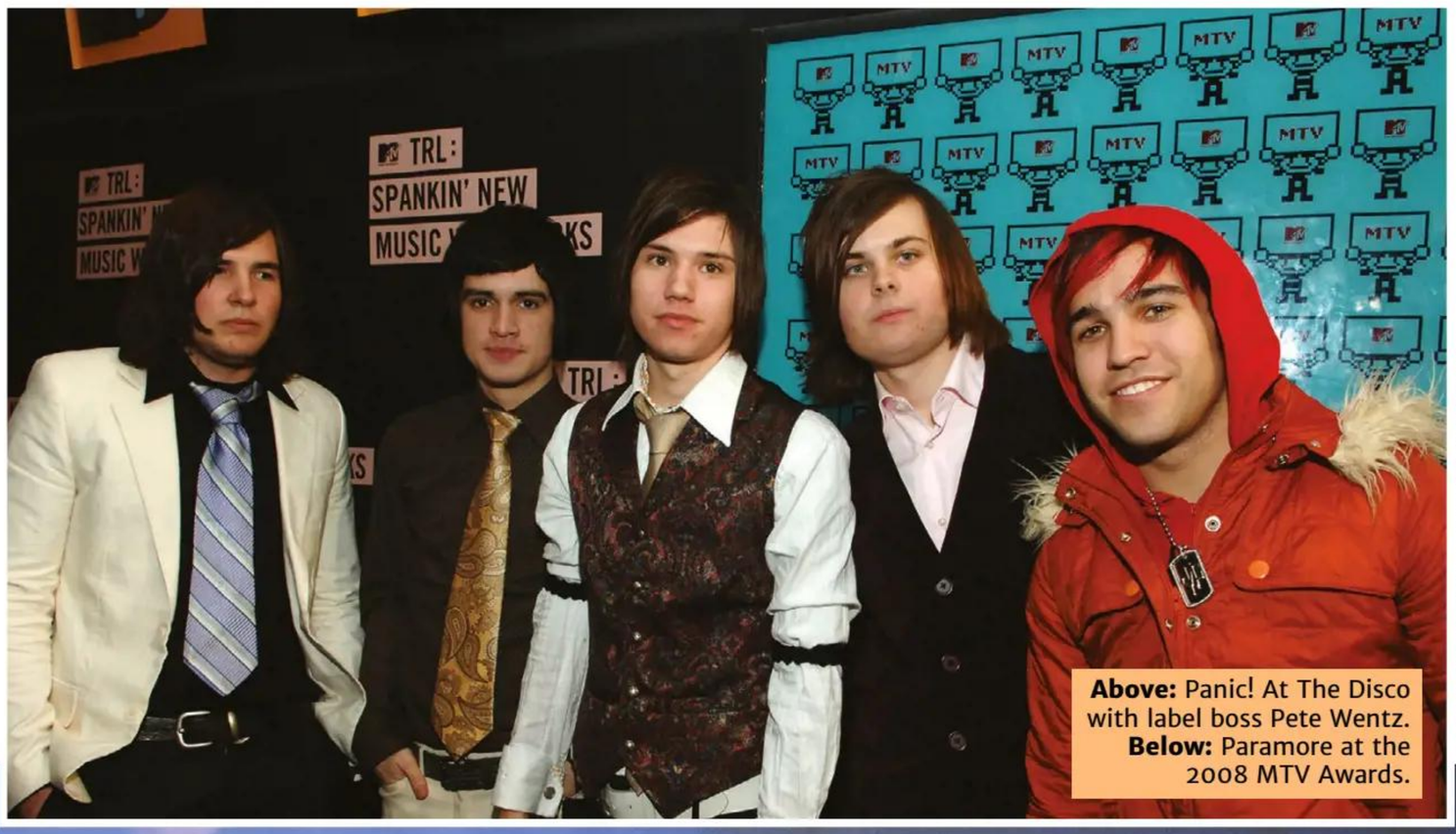
A lot of bands would certainly attain commercial success over the next few years. Even the far less accessible likes of Thursday, Alexisonfire and The Used would enjoy more recognition than could previously have been imagined, although the so-called screamo set were too ornery to ever break through on a truly mainstream level.

But it was My Chemical Romance and Fall Out Boy who truly lit a bonfire under the emo scene. The former released their debut album, *Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge* in 2004, while the anthemic *I'm Not Okay (I Promise)* was another ubiquitous MTV smash and broke into the Top 20 in the UK in 2005 – the same year that Fall Out Boy released their own breakthrough album *From Under the Cork Tree*. With Panic! At The Disco introducing themselves a few months later with *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out*, we were almost – though not quite – at peak emo.

Not that any of the bands involved were keen to embrace that term. "We worked too hard to be branded part of a trend, because when that's not cool any more, you're not either. We didn't want to end up in that Valhalla," Jimmy Eat World's Jim Adkins told *The Guardian*. My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way was rather more scathing. "I think emo is fucking garbage, it's bullshit. I think there's bands that unfortunately we get lumped in with that are considered emo and by default that starts to make us emo," he told student paper *The Maine Campus*. Fall Out Boy bassist Pete Wentz had a more tongue-in-cheek approach, telling *Rolling Stone*: "For a long time, we talked about playing in front of a giant banner that said 'EMO'. If you're emo, you might as well be in on the joke."

It could be difficult to define what emo actually was. People within the scene would debate the merits of different acts and those outside it would throw in anyone who vaguely looked the part. When Manchester Police began recording attacks on members of subcultures including goth, emo and punk as hate crimes, they found the categories tricky to define. "Self-definition is the only viable option available," criminologist Jon Garland told the BBC.

However you defined it, emo bands were still on the rise. The culture and fashions becoming more widespread and influential in the mainstream. 2006 saw the release of My Chemical Romance's third album, *The Black Parade*, which took emo to a whole new level, whether Gerard Way liked it or not. The single *Welcome To The Black Parade* gave MCR a UK No.1, while the first time they played it live was a momentous event at the top of New York City's iconic Rockefeller Plaza as part of the MTV VMAs (Video Music Awards). The subsequent tour was an epic affair and *The Black Parade* as a whole set My Chemical Romance up as one of the biggest bands in the world of any genre.



THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

BELOW: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

Above: Panic! At The Disco with label boss Pete Wentz. **Below:** Paramore at the 2008 MTV Awards.

BRYAN HARAWAY/GETTY IMAGES

Above: Fall Out Boy at MTV TRL's Summer On The Strip in Las Vegas in 2005.
Below: Gerard Way in 2007.

PAUL BERGEN/GETTY

"I LITERALLY SAID TO MYSELF, 'FUCK ART. I'VE GOTTA GET OUT OF THE BASEMENT. I'VE GOTTA MAKE A DIFFERENCE.'"

GERARD WAY

As with any alternative scene or culture gaining mainstream recognition, there was kickback. My Chemical Romance faced a hail of bottles when they played the Reading Festival in 2006 and again at Download in 2007. The word 'emo' became a pejorative for some. In the UK, the *Daily Mail* displayed mock horror with the headline 'Why no child is safe from the sinister cult of emo'. The publication had previously ran a scare story based on the parody song *Emo Kid* by comedy duo Adam and Andrew.

Speaking to *Alternative Press* towards the end of the Black Parade tour cycle, Gerard Way acknowledged that there were issues surrounding the band that went beyond the music. "There was all that tabloid nonsense in the UK, saying that we were a death cult," he said. "We'd arrive in countries and we'd be psyched that we were impacting culture. Then we'd be less than psyched when we see our kids getting hate crimes perpetrated against them—which is rooted in homophobia."

Elsewhere, Fall Out Boy landed their own massive hit in 2007 with third studio album *Infinity On High*, which debuted at number one on the US *Billboard* 200, topped the New Zealand chart and peaked in the Top 5 in other markets including the UK. They also crossed – at least partially – into the celebrity mainstream, due largely to Pete Wentz' marriage to pop singer Ashlee Simpson.

Wentz and his bandmates went through their own well-documented struggles with fame and, over the next couple of years, the scene started to crack under its own weight. Latecomers Paramore were on an upward trajectory but other bands started to drop out or change their approach and style. In 2009, Fall Out Boy went out on their Believers Never Die Part Deux tour, with Cobra Starship, All Time Low, Metro Station and Hey Monday in support. It ended up being something of a last hurrah for the band and the emo scene as a whole, with Fall Out Boy entering a hiatus shortly after.

There was still time for a huge farewell show at New York's Madison Square Garden, however, on 4 October 2009. "I was really sad that night. I cried a little before we went onstage. I thought to myself, 'Maybe this is it,'" drummer Andy Hurley told *Rolling Stone*. The show also saw Blink-182 bassist Mark Hoppus shave off Pete Wentz's signature swept locks, with Wentz declaring, "This is the death of the emo haircut."

If that really was the night that emo died, at least it went out on a high.

THE HEART

Driven by acoustic guitar and heartfelt lyrics, Dashboard Confessional's debut album *The Swiss Army Romance* introduced the world to the new face of emo.

WORDS: IAN KING

Imagining what the emo uprising of the early 2000s would have been like without Chris Carrabba and his band Dashboard Confessional is impossible. Yet, when you go back and listen to other bands from that era that were gathered up in the same movement – Saves The Day, Taking Back Sunday, et al – Dashboard are a band without direct comparison.

Their 2000 debut album *The Swiss Army Romance*, and its 2001 successor *The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most*, swam both with and against the current with equal intensity.

For a guy whose daily diet once reportedly consisted of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for both lunch and dinner, Carrabba's music has changed more from record to record than someone who wasn't otherwise familiar with his work might suspect. It's more the general perception of Dashboard Confessional that has remained the same. In 2002, the headline of a *Rolling Stone* interview declared Carrabba to be the "King of Pain." Sixteen years later, in an article heralding Dashboard Confessional's return, the *New York Times* referred to him as – yes – the "King of Pain.".

Listening to *The Swiss Army Romance*

SCOTT GRIES/IMAGEDIRECT/GETTY

BREAK 'KID'

more than 20 years after its initial, very limited release, the album doesn't come across as unduly heavy as Dashboard's reputation became. Its mood is definitely lighter than that of *The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most*, the record by which Carrabba's broadest audience was introduced to him. There is no bloodletting on the level of *This Bitter Pill*, which concludes *Places* with a draining scream. *The Swiss Army Romance* did offer earnestness in spades though, which is where the rooms full of teenagers hanging on every word came in.

Above: Dashboard Confessional's Chris Carrabba plays 2002's *MTV Unplugged* show.

"Chris was a camp counsellor for years," Carrabba's mother told *Rolling Stone* in that 2002 interview. "So when he's onstage, it's like he's doing a really big singalong."

There's no better analogy for the role Chris Carrabba played when he first stepped out on his own. Transplant the scene back then at your average Dashboard Confessional gig from being huddled around the stage at a sticky floored club to sitting on the forest floor around a campfire, and the instinctual familiarity and appeal is obvious. *Living In Your Letters* isn't exactly *Kumbaya*, but the encouragement to communicate and empathise is built into the sharing of both.

FRANK MICELOTTA/IMAGEDIRECT/GETTY

Above: Dashboard Confessional, with Chris Carrabba second right.
Right: Carrabba and guitarist Johnny Lefler at DC's *MTV Unplugged* show.

For those who weren't around, were too young, or were just simply unaware at the time of the Dashboard phenomenon, reading past accounts about the rapturous audiences that surrounded Carrabba practically from the beginning must bring at least a little disbelief. Be assured that it really did happen like that. This writer still vividly remembers a conversation with an acquaintance named Jared not long before *The Swiss Army Romance* was given a wider release by Drive-Thru Records in November of 2000. Jared's eyes widened as he explained the Dashboard Confessional experience and fielded bemused questions: "Everyone sings along? How do they already know all the words if the record isn't out?"

The story of Dashboard Confessional's early success is inextricably linked to the story of the nascent Internet's first major impact on the music world. Napster was in the ascendant at the same moment that Carrabba decided to share with those around him a batch of acoustic songs that didn't mesh with the other punk and hardcore bands he played in. His first solo performances around South Florida, where he had moved with family as a teenager, were a typically modest start in front of friends and local skater kids. If it had happened only a couple of years before, the somewhat hesitant Carrabba might have had a slow and organic growth track ahead of him, but the exponential possibilities of file sharing blew up any such gestation period.

Released by Carrabba's friend Amy Fleisher Madden on her upstart Fiddler Records that March, *The Swiss Army Romance*'s first pressing was only one thousand copies, but the Internet dubbed it faster than a fleet of teenage tape decks ever could

"Dashboard Confessional was then the best possible kind of secret, one you want to share with everyone you know and care about," observed author Andy Greenwald in his 2003 book *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers, And Emo*. "Links to MP3s of *Swiss Army...* songs began popping up on the messageboards of like-minded bands... the Napster file-trading service was at its peak, allowing Carrabba's songs to crisscross the country like good-luck chain letters, spreading his legend and lyrics to places he'd never even visited, let alone performed in."

This was the point when Carrabba would start rolling into venues packed with new fresh faces singing all of his words back at him. This was desired and encouraged by Carrabba, who at every performance would ask his audiences not if they were ready to hear him sing a song, but if they were ready to sing one with him. Having come out of a punk scene, this piercing of the veil between audience and performer was the most punk rock thing about Dashboard Confessional. It was also an equality that most punk rock, with all of its amplification and noise, could rarely achieve: everyone was in the band, participating and not just observing.

Spreading right along with online testimonials about the power of Dashboard's music were stories of that concert experience, which became a sort of self-aware, self-fulfilling prophecy. The picture Jared painted in our conversation in the fall of 2000 was identical to the one Greenwald carried over in his book a few years later. It was an honest, emotional interaction, but after a while it couldn't be spontaneous in the way that it would be if it happened at other shows where the ritual wasn't pre-established. Singing along wasn't mandatory, but at some point you might feel a little out of the loop if you didn't.

It also didn't necessarily suit everyone. Jared and I were only a year or so apart in age, and had bonded over a mutual love of emocore when he saw me wearing a Mineral T-shirt. I could easily hear that Dashboard Confessional were quantifiably "emo," but something in its nature felt different from the impassioned post-hardcore of the 1990s, beyond the obvious unplugged delivery of the songs. Perhaps it was the unflinching directness at a time when at least a little abstraction was still the indie norm. Dashboard Confessional were one of the first notable figures of

"DASHBOARD CONFESSIONAL WERE NOTABLE NOT SIMPLY BECAUSE OF THEIR TIMING, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF WHO THEY SPOKE TO."

KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

third-generation emo not simply because of their timing, but also because of who they spoke to.

Carrabba also stood out for how he spoke to his listeners. In an interview with Tom Mullen for the *Washed Up Emo* podcast at the end of 2014, Carrabba cited Bob Dylan's 1975 masterpiece *Blood On The Tracks* as being one of the first albums to inspire him to play guitar. *Blood On The Tracks* has to qualify as Dylan's most emo album, but Carrabba's songwriting on *The Swiss Army Romance* had as much to do with Dylan's mid-'60s work, when his songs felt foremost guided by the words. Countless musicians bow to Dylan, but they don't often emulate the verbosity of his lyrics in his prime.

It is common for songwriters to shape their lyrics to fit a melody, but it's hard to imagine Dashboard songs like *Again I Go Unnoticed* and *The Swiss Army Romance*'s title track being born that way. The lyrics take the lead and the chords follow. The version of *Screaming Infidelities* which opens *The Swiss Army Romance* is just Carrabba's voice and guitar alone, and it makes sense in its own rhythm. Re-recorded a year later for *The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most* with additional instrumentation, the song's idiosyncratic timing is brought to light as the drums mostly have to chase and counterpunch, and don't lock in step with the guitar until the final segment.

The Places You Have Come To Fear The Most, down is even more voluble than *The Swiss Army Romance*, and Carrabba still had plenty left over to say on *The Moon Is Down*, the 2001 debut album from Florida band Further Seems Forever, which he fronted until Dashboard took off (and has occasionally returned to since). There are times on *Swiss Army...* when it sounds as if Carrabba hears a full band in his head, most notably *Ender Will Save Us All* with its pop-punk downstrokes, but also on tracks like *The Sharp Hint Of New Tears*. It's a shame that *Ender Will Save Us All* wasn't brought back with *Screaming Infidelities* and *Again I Go Unnoticed* for that treatment on *Places*, or on 2003's more musically aggressive follow-up, *A Mark, A Mission, A Brand, A Scar*.

This is somewhat beside the point, since listening to Dashboard Confessional wasn't so much about getting hooks stuck in your head as it was about getting things out. It was group therapy at gigs and in suburban bedrooms across the country. Carrabba's intense interpersonal dissections and purges confirmed the suspicions of many thousands of teenagers that their thoughts and feelings were the most important thing in the world. Dashboard's appeal had facets that were both generation-specific and universal. *The Swiss Army Romance* forged the kind of artist-audience bond that isn't easy to duplicate or deteriorate.

No band embodied emo's maverick spirit and theatrical leanings like My Chemical Romance. This is the story of their rise, fall and resurrection.

WORDS: SAM COARE

Gerard Way was 24 years old when he witnessed the apocalypse. The day had started off like any other morning for the fledgling graphic designer. A graduate of Manhattan's School of Visual Arts, Way would regularly find himself commuting from his parents' home in Newark, New Jersey back to New York's beating heart for internships at the likes of DC Comics and the Cartoon Network, to whom Way was in the process of (ultimately unsuccessfully) pitching a bizarre animated short named *The Breakfast Monkey*.

September 11, 2001 was different, however. Way's commute would see him take the train to Hoboken, from where he would get the ferry across the Hudson river to Manhattan. It was here, standing alongside hundreds of his fellow travellers that he witnessed the first, and then the second, of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers crash to the ground. "It was like being in a science fiction film or some kind of disaster film – it was exactly that kind of feeling," Way later told *Vice* of what he saw that day. "You didn't believe it. It made no sense. Your brain couldn't process it. All these people behind me, they all had friends and family in those buildings. When that first building went, it was like an A-bomb went off. It made you nauseous."

It was in that moment that Gerard Way's life would change forever. "I need to do something ➤

"WE THOUGHT WE COULD GET EVEN FOR ALL THE SHIT THAT'S HAPPENED TO US IN OUR LIVES."

GERARD WAY

THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

JERSEY BOYS

Left: MCR live at London's Hammersmith Palais in 2006.
Right: Gerard Way with 30 Seconds To Mars' Jared Leto.

"ALL OF THE THINGS THAT MADE US GREAT WERE THE VERY THINGS THAT WERE GOING TO END US."

GERARD WAY

that actually means something, or my life is going to mean nothing," he would later recall feeling. Though he had no experience of playing in bands to this point, music had long been a passion. "The world changed that day," Way reflected on a social media post 20 years on. "And the next day we set about trying to change the world."

Within a week, Way would pen the song *Skylines And Turnstiles*, channelling his emotions of that disassociation he felt with the world on that day: *'This broken city sky / Like butane on my skin,'* he wrote. *'Tell me where we go from here.'* Soon after, he'd go about pulling together a rag-tag band of fellow Jerseyites. Drummer Matt Pelissier was an old pal; together, the pair would piece together a rudimentary demo of *Skyline And Turnstiles* in a bid to entice Ray Toro, the best guitarist the pair knew. Way's younger brother Mikey didn't possess any bass skills, but he did have a thirst to learn and – more importantly – the idea for a killer band name, lifted from an Irvine Welsh book he'd seen while working in his local bookstore.

Gerard Way would go on to become unhappy with his band's genre classification – "I don't really feel like we're part of the emo culture," he would say diplomatically at one turn; "Emo's a pile of shit, fucking garbage," he would say in more antagonistic moments – no name is more synonymous with emo than My Chemical Romance. As Nirvana had become unhappy poster boys for grunge and Korn similarly for nu-metal, the look, sound and inclusive, life-affirming message of 'My Chem' would inescapably become the de facto look, sound and message of emo, third wave or otherwise.

No one captured the hearts and minds of young rock fans – and, importantly, a young, female-heavy fanbase introduced to rock music through the band – in the mid-2000s as widely or deeply. No style became as iconic as their black marching band jackets. No other genre can be encapsulated by so little as a singular G note played on a piano. "It's one thing to create an iconic set of chords, it's another to make one note iconic," said unlikely fan Andrew Lloyd Webber.

My Chemical Romance might never have wanted to be 'emo', but emo is and forever will be My Chemical Romance.

Frank Iero knew there was something special about the band from the very first time he laid eyes on them – at their very first show, no less. Little over a month after forming, My Chemical Romance opened for their future guitarist's then band, Pencey Prep, at one of the many Elks Lodges scattered across their home state – social clubs the like of which would prove similarly formative to fellow local bands such as Thursday, Saves The Day and Senses Fail. "I remember being like, 'Holy shit, there's something really special here,'" Iero told the author Dan Ozzi for his scene history book *Sellout*. "And everyone knew it. Everyone knew it.

"They handed out a demo, [and] there was something really special about those songs. I'd play them over and over again and say, 'How is this so good? These kids came out of nowhere, and they're fucking incredible.'"

Debut album *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love*, released the next July with Iero – now long minted as the band's fifth member – was a scratchy, schizophrenic collection that saw the band looking backwards for inspiration in emo's recent past as much as it saw them hinting at a future sound of their own. But it was enough to turn tastemaker heads, get the band booked on formative tours nationwide and, crucially, put them in the sights of labels both independent and major. It was to the surprise of few who watched the band's rapid ascendency when they opted to go with Warner Bros imprint Reprise for their breakthrough 2004 second album, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge*.

The album featured some of the band's most beloved songs: *Helena* (penned in honour of and named after the Way brothers' beloved grandmother who had died the November before), *I'm Not Okay (I Promise)*, which saw the older Way mine painful memories of high school hardships, and *Thank You For The Venom*, which fired back at the naysayers that gnawed away at a shy, emotionally sensitive frontman who would soon be self-medicating in a bid to quell his nagging insecurities. *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* captured the rock zeitgeist in its effervescent hooks and self-deprecating angst that encapsulated the mood of the ever-swelling numbers of fans swearing allegiance to the 'MCRmy'.

"This record is revenge for us," Gerard told *Kerrang!*. "[Revenge] on all the people that said we would never succeed. We thought we could get even for all the shit that's happened to us in our lives. Revenge that could mean we could break out. Most of all, revenge on all the people who never believed in us.

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

LEFT: GARY CLARK/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

BELOW: NAKI/REDFERNS/GETTY

"We all felt like outcasts. That's what brought us together. We thrive on conflict, opposition… everything. I've always felt like that. At first it was us versus New York City. Then it felt like the band vs. America. Now it's us vs. the world."

There would be one winner. On August 31, 2005, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* was certified platinum, marking one million sales in the United States, a mere two weeks before the band was toasting only their fourth year in existence altogether.

It would only be the start, of course. Where *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* had made My Chem unlikely stars, *The Black Parade*, released in October 2006, ordained them as superstars. "This band has always had a desire to achieve greatness," Way told *Kerrang!* in the afterglow of making the record. "It's always loved the taste of victory, it loves winning, and it loves beating the odds. I feel like we've put everything on black and spun the roulette wheel. But you know what? If

MCR in 2005: (from left) Ray Toro, Mikey Way, Gerard Way, Frank Iero, Bob Bryar.

Left: MCR guitarist Frank Iero in full flight in 2006. **Below right:** Gerard Way on MCR's 2021 comeback tour.

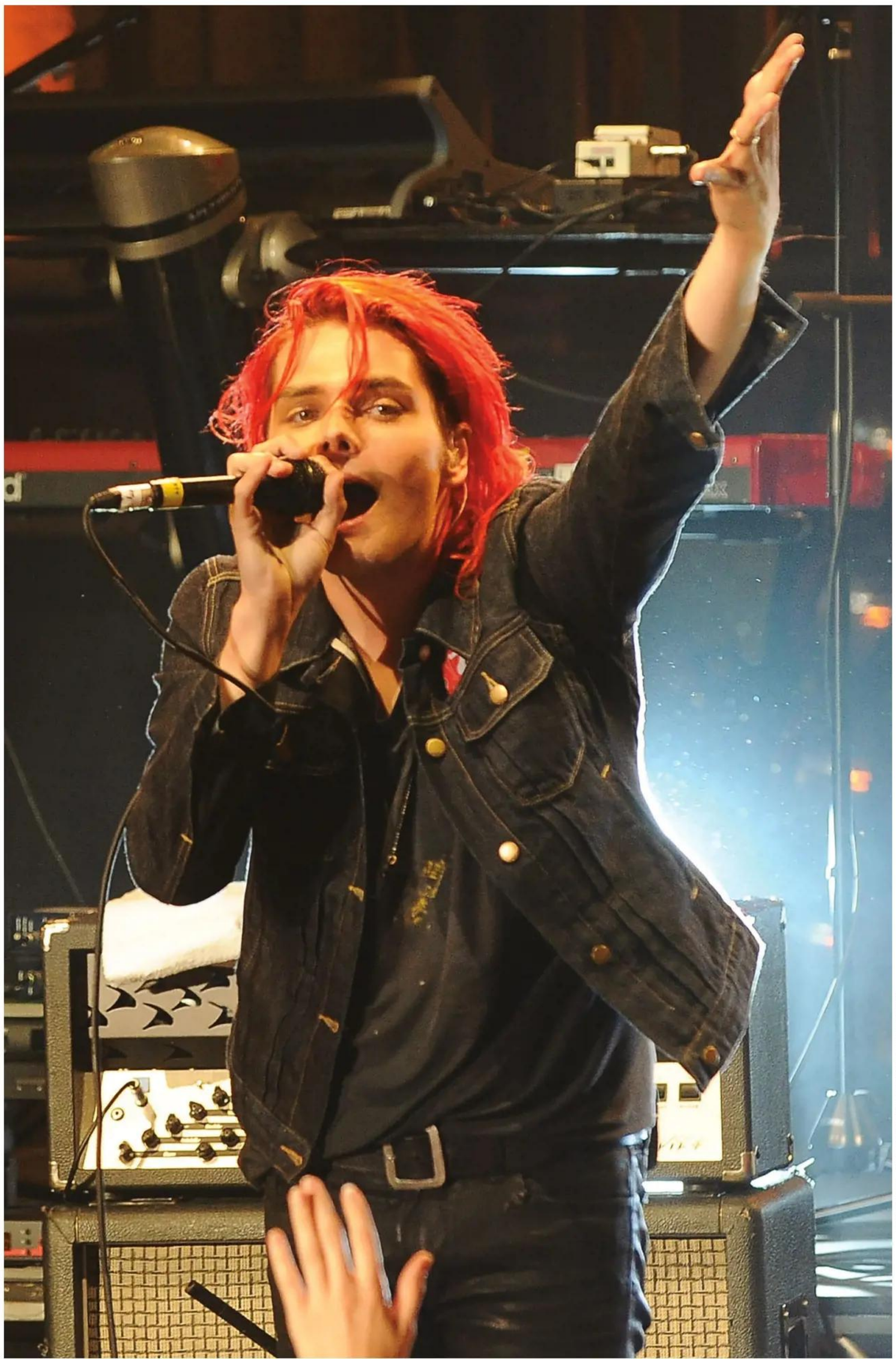
you're not risking everything, you might as well not play at all."

And so My Chemical Romance pushed their chips all-in, holing up in Los Angeles to bring to life their vision for a rock opera telling the story of a cancer patient's death and afterlife, taking cues from David Bowie, Queen, The Beatles and Pink Floyd. Gerard's obsession with birthing a masterpiece saw him work until exhaustion set in, rendering him a "fucking lunatic". He would go entire evenings without sleep; when he did nod off, he would suffer from night terrors (inspiring the album track *Sleep*). Frank Iero described the band as perpetually on the edge of complete collapse. Mikey Way, suffering from depression and addiction, ended up in rehab.

Such, in the eyes of the album's creators, was the price of greatness. Emerging emotionally frayed and mentally scarred, Gerard said: "I knew that we'd created a monster." Its suitably theatrical reveal came little over a month after its completion, at London's Hammersmith Palais, when anticipation of the band's arrival onstage was punctured by an announcement over the PA stating that My Chem would not be appearing tonight – replaced, instead, by their "good friends". It was with these words that 1,800 people first lay eyes on the album's iconic Sgt Peppers style outfits, and the striking image of a blond, buzzcut Gerard that would soon be splashed across a million teenage bedrooms.

"MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE CAN NEVER DIE. BECAUSE IT IS NOT A BAND – IT IS AN IDEA."

GERARD WAY



LEFT: FRANK MULLEN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

The new songs heard that night – *Welcome To The Black Parade*, *The End*, *Dead!*, *Cancer* – would be heard on stages as big as New York's Madison Square Garden and London's Wembley Arena as MCR exploded.

"We want this to be the album that My Chemical Romance is remembered for," Mikey Way had stated upon the album's announcement. "We want the entire world to be moved." Whether it was in headlining the world's biggest rock festivals, facing down tabloid newspapers who labelled the band a "suicide cult band" and detractors who saw them as simply a boy band with guitars, or being held up as the "album that saved my life" by the fanatical MCRmy, *The Black Parade*, loved and loathed in equal divisive measure, became the byword for not only the emo scene, but a generation of rock music.

It became, too, the millstone around My Chemical Romance's neck that would slowly bring about their demise. A backbreaking world tour in its support pushed them to the brink; soon after, a stripped-down, concept-free follow-up album was shelved due to their disillusionment with their work (the recordings would later see the light of day as 2012's *Conventional Weapons* set). In its place, a new album – *Danger Days: The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys* – embraced the same fantastical world-building of *The Black Parade*, but with a decidedly power-pop hue, in stark opposition to its predecessor's maudlin mood. Despite work on a fifth album continuing throughout 2012, in March 2013, under the exhausting weight of their own now gargantuan size, My Chemical Romance announced their split. "All of the things that made us great were the very things that were going to end us," wrote Gerard in a lengthy personal statement.

The split did not last, of course – few nowadays do, given the demand for and budgets of the Nostalgia Train – with My Chem, refreshed and re-energised, returning to the stage in 2019, before embarking on a stadium tour in 2020 and releasing their lone new song since, *The Foundations Of Decay*, in 2022. In October 2024, they will perform *The Black Parade* in its entirety at the When We Were Young festival; 16 years since its release – a testament to the power of the band and album's connection with its fanbase – atop a bill that owes an enormous debt of gratitude to the influence and inspiration of the band. In so much, the 2013 words of its founder ring truer than ever: "My Chemical Romance can never die. It is alive in me, in the guys, and it is alive inside all of you. Because it is not a band – it is an idea."

MICHAEL BUCKNER/GETTY IMAGES/AXE

"THIS BAND IS THE ONLY THING I HAVE GOING FOR ME. IT'S THE ONLY THING I CAN DO RIGHT"

GERARD KNEW WHERE HIS STRENGTHS LAY

Warriors Of The Road

When Hammer was invited to join Gerard et all on 2005's incarnation of the Vans Warped Tour, we could hardly refuse…

WORDS: IAN WINWOOD • PHOTOS: JOHN MCMURTRIE

The man standing by the side of the road has a look of resigned understanding on his face. It's as if he realises that the task he's up against today is insurmountable, a tide of opposition that can neither be held back nor reasoned with. The sun is beating down like a truncheon, remorseless, all day long. The man stands tall, making a stand.

A car drives by, its passenger leans from the window and shouts, "You fucking asshole!"

The man's name is Bob Adams, a suave-looking gentleman with wavy blond hair and pastel-coloured, country club clothing. He is standing at the entrance to the Hi-Fi Buys Amphitheater in Atlanta holding a sign that demands you 'READ THE HOLY BIBLE DAILY'.

It's midday on Wednesday August 3. Today is the day the Vans Warped Tour visits Atlanta, Georgia. Something like 30,000 southern punk rockers are pulling their cars onto the grass car parks and heading for the entrances. On the way, they are driving and walking past Bob Adams.

"Get a life you fucking dick!"

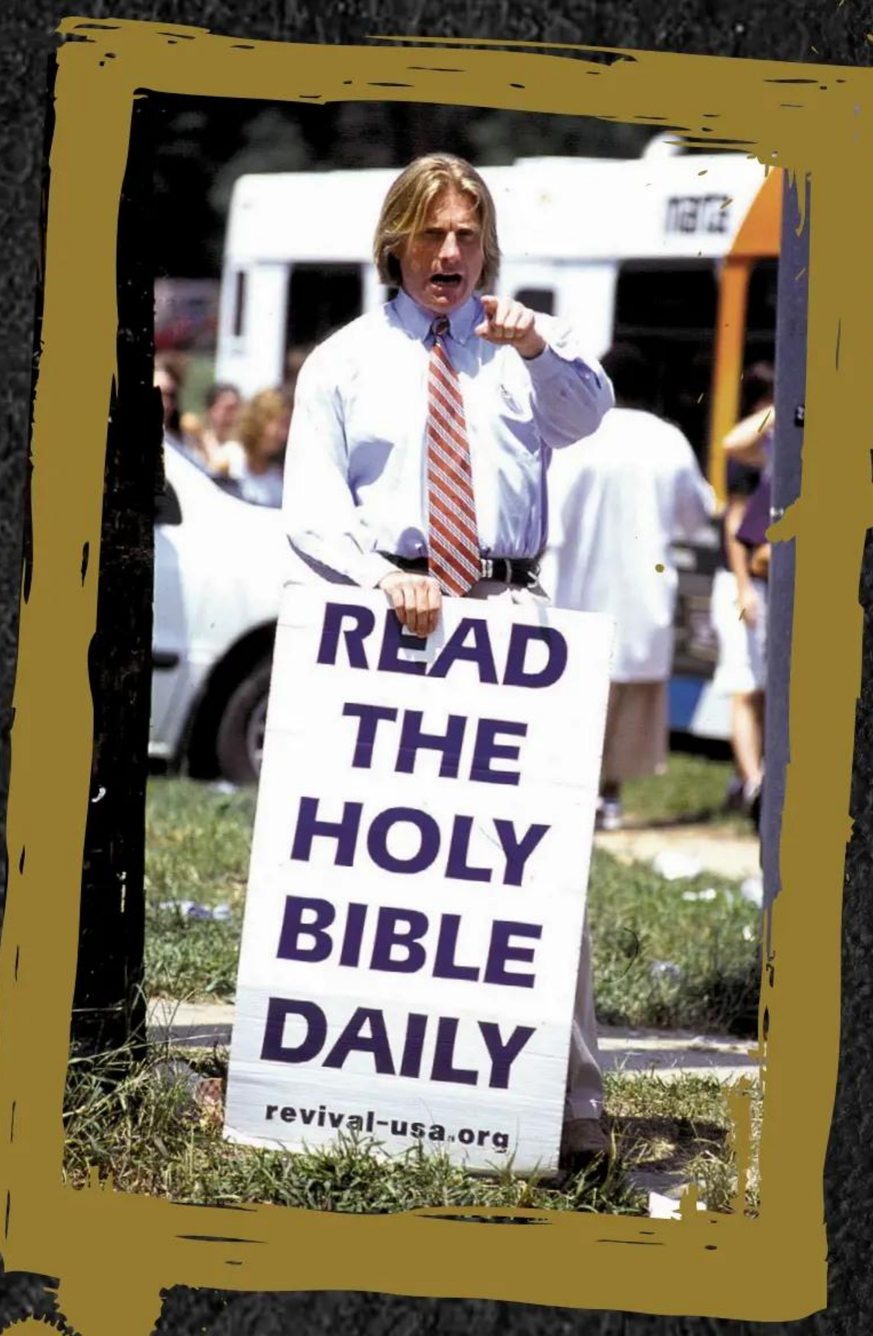
Bob Adams just smiles and waves an arm in friendly riposte. "I'm just here to talk to people," he says, by way of explanation. "To tell them about the word of the Bible. I'll have a conversation with anyone who wants to talk. I don't mind who they are. I'll be standing here all day."

There are some Christians who believe that festivals such as this one are ungodly. Are you one of them?

"Well…" and here Bob Adams smiles, the smile of a man well used to questions such as this. "I try not to be too judgemental. But the word of God is in the Bible, and anything else runs contrary to the scriptures. The message these people are getting today is not from the Bible so, yes, I guess it is against the word of God."

Do you think festivals such as this are the same as going to church for the people who attend?

This time it's My Chemical Romance's vocalist Gerard Way who answers the question. The singer is sitting in the air-conditioned silence in the back lounge of his crew's tour bus. Outside the sun is bearing down like a psychopathic stare. It's 10 minutes to two, an hour or so before My Chemical Romance are due to take to the stage ▶



for their 40-minute set of high-energy rock'n'roll. "I don't know," he says, "I've never really thought of it like that."

Gerard then proceeds to think of it like that. "I know it sounds really stupid when bands say things like this, but there is definitely a spiritual element to the music for us. I know that might sound crap, but we really do put everything into our performance. The very reason we're here is for those moments when we're on stage. Everything else is just crap. I don't mean to be rude when I say this, but talking to you right now is crap. It's just something I do when I'm waiting to get onstage. And so for us there is a kind of devotional quality to playing, yeah."

And for the audience?

"That's difficult to say," he reckons. "We do have a fanatical element, that's for sure. I do know that there are more problems in terms of safety when we play than for any other band on this tour."

Yeah, you could say that. Despite the depth and breadth of the Vans Warped Tour – which this year features, among others (deep breath), Avenged Sevenfold, Offspring, Dropkick Murphys, Hawthorne Heights, Millencolin, Transplants, Funeral For A Friend and MxPx, as well as some 80-odd more – it's for My Chemical Romance that the audience reserves its highest reaches of insanity.

Whereas no more than 5,000 people crowd each of the larger stages for other bands (there are four main Warped Tour stages, as well as a handful of smaller platforms scattered around the site), it seems that every ticket holder here today, at exactly 3pm, heads to a spot where My Chem Rom can be seen. For the following 40 minutes, it's all melee and melody, a flurry of faces and limbs in the horrible heat; security guards earning their keep, pulling people over the barriers; people getting hurt. That kind of thing.

At the end of the set, Gerard Way, as he does each day, walks to the first aid area. Today he's checking on the well-being of a young fan, freshly fitted with a neck brace. *Hammer* photographer John McMurtrie attempts to take a picture of him doing this.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" screams a medic.

Excuse us?

"I said, what the fuck are you doing?" The man is clearly blood-red angry. "Do you know the consequences

"THERE ARE MORE SAFETY PROBLEMS FOR US THAN ANY OTHER BAND ON THIS TOUR"

CODE RED SECURITY IS AT THE READY...

of publishing a photograph of a first-aid worker without written permission?"

No. No, we don't.

"Well then, get the fuck out of here!"

On board one of My Chemical Romance's two buses – one is for the band themselves, the other for their road crew – things are more serene. In fact, what with the extra six feet of space allocated by an extendable living area (pulled out when the bus is parked), you could almost imagine that you're sat in the kitchen of a brightly lit suburban home.

Drummer Bob Bryar smokes Marlboro Ultra Lights and plays an online computer game, something to do with burning wigwams and slicing up centaurs. Gerard strolls in wearing a bulletproof vest, although not so bulletproof that it'll actually stop a bullet ("It's more of a general statement," he reveals, enigmatically). Guitarist Ray Toro, all wild hair and long limbs, passes the time, talking small and laughing quietly. Frank Iero and Mikey Way drift in and out, offering cold drinks and casual conversation.

A My Chemical Romance video (*Helena*) plays on the bus television, live on MTV. The band have been nominated for four Video Music Awards, the posh ceremony for which is to be held in Miami at the end of August. In the meantime, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* – MCR's sophomore album – is about to turn platinum (one million sales) in the United States. The future's so bright, they're all wearing black.

"I think one of the reasons [for our success] is the fact that some of us are a little bit older," says the band's singer. "I'm 28 years old and I have failed in other areas of my life, whether that be in personal relationships or in looking for a job... things like that. I know what it is to fail. So this band is almost the only thing I have going for me. It's almost the only thing I can do right. And I know we do it right, and I know that people can see how much this thing means to us."

What is it that people like about you?

"I think that people can see themselves in us," believes Frank Iero. "But at the same time we're not just everyday guys. We are for most of the day, but then when we play we're something else entirely. I think that people can see themselves in us, without actually being us. So there is that aspirational element to what we do. I think that has something to do with it."

In Atlanta, My Chemical Romance play twice in one day. On one occasion they play for thousands of hyperactive – occasionally homicidal – fans, flailing and thrashing in the punishing heat. Before this, the group practise their entire set before an audience of one photographer and one journalist at the back of their bus. This is something they do every day: Gerard Way sings just one song and then leaves, while his bandmates practise every number they're scheduled to play live in concert.

This is how they do it. Just past the bunks, up at the rear of the bus are racks of musical and computer equipment, the kind of high-tech gadgetry that looks capable of launching a satellite probe. In the middle

stands a drum kit. The group gather around it playing their songs, only they're doing it through headphones, so each member can hear the other but no one outside of the band can hear anything except the strum of unamplified guitars and the hollow beat of electronic drums.

Gerard Way stands in the middle of the room with his back turned, singing along to *Ghost Of You*. Despite there being no volume and no audience, each note is sung with passion, in tune.

Watching My Chemical Romance onstage allows us to get some sense of what Gerard Way means when he tells you just what it is his band are about. The charisma of their frontman is truly something to see, a star in the ascendant, approachable yet unattainable in equal measure. But each member has something to offer, both to the ear and to the eye. This is a group in a real sense of the word – a gang who work together, a gang who work hard together. Even on a scaffold stage built on the back of a truck, with no lights, in the kind of heat that should come with an Ennio Morricone soundtrack, it's impossible not to sense the impact, and this group's exponential potential.

"You know what?" asks the singer. "We're quite a simple band."

Really? Why's that?

"Because we don't spend our money on cocaine or on hookers or on booze. We just read a lot of comic books and ride around on our tour bus…"

You boring bunch of bastards!

"We really are." Gerard smiles, then he thinks about it and amends his statement. "Apart from when we get up and play. And then we're something different. Then we're not boring at all."

"I KNOW THAT PEOPLE CAN SEE HOW MUCH THIS THING MEANS TO US."

THE MCRMY FEELS THE LOVE

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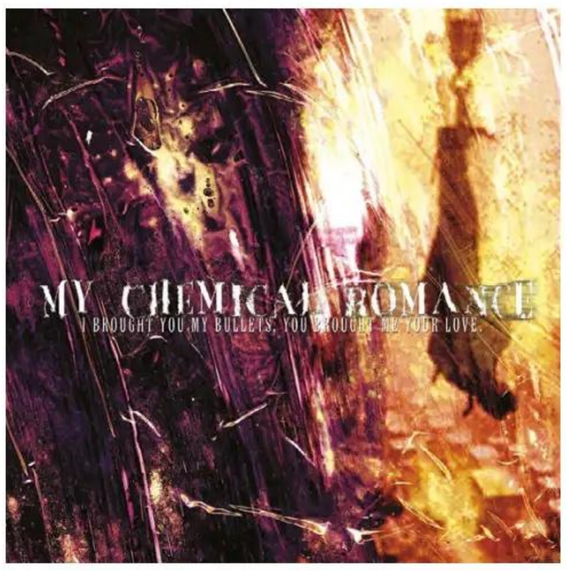
MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

I BROUGHT YOU MY BULLETS, YOU BROUGHT ME YOUR LOVE 2002
THREE CHEERS FOR SWEET REVENGE 2004
THE BLACK PARADE 2006

MCR's holy trinity of 2000s albums reassessed.

WORDS: MADDY HOWELL

It should come as no surprise that Gerard Way was drawn to the creation of vivid fantasy worlds when he became a musician. He was a 24-year-old aspring omic book artist fresh off an internship with DC Comics and on the verge of pitching his own series to Cartoon Network.



September 11, 2001 changed that. MCR were a direct response to Gerard witnessing the 9/11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center. Stood on a dock on the Hudson River, surrounded by anguish and sorrow, his attempt to process the catastrophic events would come to form the pleading, existential *Skylines And Turnstiles*, the first glimmerings of an album that was not only coloured by death but basking in it.

That album, MCR's 2002 debut *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love*, is a bold statement. Produced by Thursday frontman Geoff Rickly, while it had the hallmarks of the hardcore scene that surrounded the band in New Jersey in the early 2000s, a dedication to fantasy set it apart.

A semi-concept album told from the perspective of a vampire protagonist setting out to avenge his lover's death, it's a raw, bloodthirsty collection of songs. As dark as it is dramatic, what *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love* lacks in the grandiosity of MCR's later work, it more than makes up for in broodiness. From the driving, unpolished guitars of *Vampires Will Never Hurt You* – complete with throat-shredding screams from Way – to the darkly off-kilter melodies of *Drowning Lessons*, it's the sound of a band finding their identity, and taking some intriguing turns to get there: the lo-fi Spanish acoustic intro of *Romance*, or the

I BROUGHT YOU MY BULLETS, YOU BROUGHT ME YOUR LOVE

Released: July 2002
Personnel: Gerard Way (vocals), Ray Toro (guitars), Mikey Way (bass), Matt Pelissier (drums), Frank Iero (additional guitars)
Peak chart position: No.129 (UK)
Tracklisting:
Romance
Honey, This Mirror Isn't Big Enough for the Two of Us
Vampires Will Never Hurt You
Drowning Lessons
Our Lady of Sorrows
Headfirst for Halos
Skylines and Turnstiles
Early Sunsets Over Monroeville
This Is the Best Day Ever
Cubicles
Demolition Lovers

NAKI/REDFERNS/GETTY

Above: My Chemical Romance circa *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge*.
Right: Gerard Way on 2006's Black Parade tour.

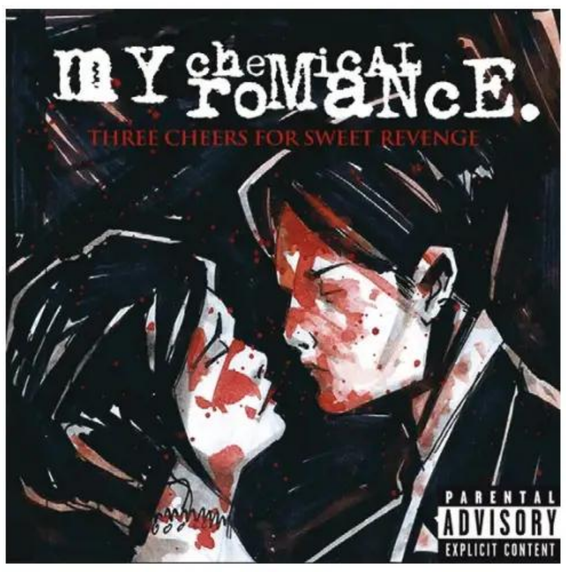
CARLEY MARGOLIS/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

THREE CHEERS FOR SWEET REVENGE

Released: June 2004
Personnel: Gerard Way, Ray Toro, Frank Iero, Mikey Way, Matt Pelissier
Peak chart position: No.34 (UK), No.28 (US)
Tracklisting:
Helena
Give 'Em Hell, Kid
To The End
You Know What They Do To Guys Like Us in Prison
I'm Not Okay (I Promise)
The Ghost Of You
The Jetset Life Is Gonna Kill You
Interlude
Thank You For The Venom
Hang 'Em High
It's Not A Fashion Statement, It's A Fucking Deathwish
Cemetery Drive
I Never Told You What I Do For A Living

eyebrow-raising dance-metal leanings of *Our Lady Of Sorrow*, for example.

Veering between sounds and styles at breakneck speed, it established My Chemical Romance as a band unafraid to take the most audacious and sometimes ridiculous creative risks. Even in its most formulaic moments, like the bright yet sombre guitar melodies of *Early Sunsets Over Monroeville* and the jaunty punk drive of *Headfirst For Halos* – whose lyrics forming a graphic depiction of suicide – there's an endearing weirdness at play, waiting to be honed into something spectacular.



By the time My Chemical Romance's second album, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge*, arrived in 2004, a lot had changed. The band were headlining shows across the UK, vastly outgrowing the intimate clubs that had been their training ground back home in Passaic, New Jersey. Joining forces with producers Howard Benson, *My Chemical Romance* shot for arena rock stardom and hit the bullseye.

Recounting the story of two star-crossed lovers separated by death, it's a tale of pain, loss, and, perhaps most iconically, romance.

It opens with a tribute to Way's beloved grandmother, who died while the band were away on tour. *Helena* is perhaps the perfect emo song: its restrained guitars underline Way's throaty whisper before bursting into a flurry of distortion and desperate screams, his anguish forming the perfect introduction to an album defined by its vindictive frustration.

With outsider anthem *I'm Not Okay (I Promise)* launching the band to MTV stardom, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* successfully walked a fine line between vulnerability and melodrama. Developing their song structure and melody in new and exciting ways, the defiant, pensive ballad *The Ghost Of You* proved that the five-piece were capable of softer moments, while the devilish *You Know What They Do To Guys Like Us In Prison* flaunts a black humour amidst its scattered references to queerness. Tackling the ideas of masculinity and violence in a manner simultaneously playful and rebellious, this was the sound of a group of New Jersey outcasts acknowledging that teenage emotions are tricky, but every one of us is valid.

Intertwining the worlds of 19th century Romantic poetry and horror B-movies, it was here that the fivesome's flair for flamboyance truly set in. From the Spaghetti Western intro to *Hang 'Em High* to the blood-soaked wedding crashing hijinks of *To The End*, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* is sorrowful, cinematic and at times downright frightful. Basking in gothic imagery and metallic riffs, Way's nihilistic yet introspective worldview helped catapult the band to new heights, their over-the-top conceptual take on expressing their emotions gripping a generation of troubled teens.

By 2006, My Chemical Romance were ready to become the biggest band not just in the emo scene but on the planet. And what better way to accomplish that than with an ostentatious rock-opera concept album? Challenging every preconception anyone ever had about the band, *The Black Parade* is unlike any other album released by any of their peers. A story beginning in a cancer ward with the tragic death of a protagonist simply known as The Patient, what unfolds over its 50-minute run time is a tour de force of showstopping ambition.

Swerving away from emo in its sonic leanings, from the second the opening scream of *Dead!* breaks into a frenzied guitar solo, we're in stadium punk territory. A rich new depth colouring its sound, *The Black Parade* marries the kitsch and bombast of rock's golden age with a vicious punk bite that's almost impossible to emulate. From the almost comical operatics of *Mama* – featuring a brief duet with Liza Minnelli – to the stabbing arena-filling riffs of *This Is How I Disappear*, it

"CHALLENGING EVERY PRECONCEPTION ABOUT MCR, *THE BLACK PARADE* IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER ALBUM RELEASED BY ANY OF THEIR PEERS"

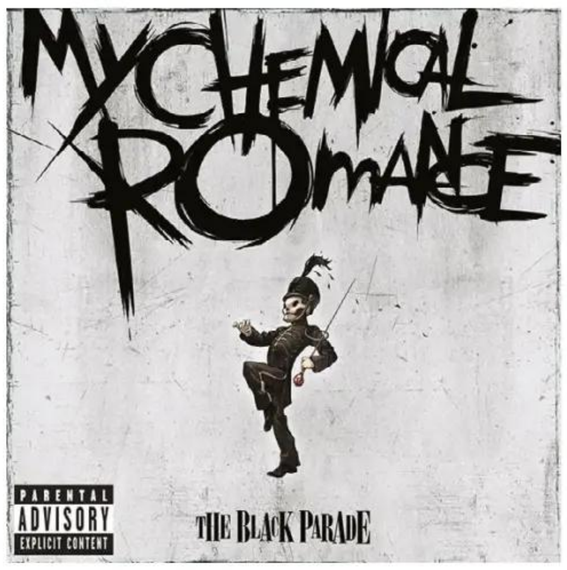
MATTHEW SIMMONS/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

THE BLACK PARADE

Released: October 2006
Personnel: Gerard Way, Ray Toro, Frank Iero, Mikey Way, Bob Bryar (drums)
Peak chart position: No.2 (UK), No.2 (US)
Tracklisting:
The End
Dead!
This Is How I Disappear
The Sharpest Lives
Welcome To The Black Parade
I Don't Love You
House of Wolves
Cancer
Mama
Sleep
Teenagers
Disenchanted
Famous Last Words
Blood (hidden track)

offers proof that emo's earnestness was ready for the biggest of stages.

At the heart of it all was *Welcome To The Black Parade*, stilll the ultimate anthem for the misunderstood. The song's opening, single G-note still stirs something visceral in the hearts of once- disenfranchised youths, while the rallying calls of the song's outro} are enough to bring a tear to a glass eye.



The whole album finds Way going full manic rock-hero, through the resilient, relentless march of *Famous Last Words* and the anarchic swing of *House Of Wolves*. The swagger gives way to sheer devastation during piano ballad *Cancer*, a graphic first-person account of death from the harrowing disease. Behind the military jackets and Broadway-sized ambition, emotion remains at the heart of My Chemical Romance - but on *The Black Parade* the five-piece fully surpass the emo scene.

Comprising songs that somehow feel remarkably intimate while steeped in Hollywood melodrama, it's their magnum opus, solidifying their rise from scruffy New Jersey punks to boundary-smashing rock storytellers.

Trying their hand at multi-section epics, gut-wrenching string-adorned ballads and instrumentals that sound as though they were plucked straight from Hell itself, on *The Black Parade* the genius of My Chemical Romance fully blossomed. A fearless approach to songwriting and storytelling catapulting the band to a global phenomenon, there's not a single moment on the album that doesn't invoke sheer awe. An ode to overcoming the trials of life and raising a swift middle finger to anyone who tries to stop you, *The Black Parade* is more than an album: it's a statement about what's possible when you break all the rules laid out in front of you.

One Vision

Six months after *The Black Parade* made them the biggest band on the planet, *Metal Hammer* endeavoured to find out if that success had become a poisoned chalice in our most in-depth MCR interview yet…

WORDS: ALEXANDER MILAS • PHOTOS: JUSTIN BORUCKI

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

My Chemical Romance in 2006: (from left) Ray Toro, Mikey Way, Gerard Way, Frank Iero, Bob Bryar.

There's little point belabouring what's now an undeniable truth: My Chemical Romance, erstwhile New Jersey nobodies with a dream, are fucking huge. But if you think their follow-up to 2004's already rapturously received *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* is merely a commercially minded cash grab then think again. It's a big, fuck-off concept album that more happily sits in a peer group born in the 70s. But, as even they acknowledge, the making of *The Black Parade* was no split-second decision.

Fraught with fears about its reception and their own ability to even achieve such lofty artistic heights, their time in the studio was a jumping-off point into a chasm that may just have been an abyss. Instead, they found themselves at the top of the charts, and – judging by how hard it is to get hold of them these days – it's been a softer landing than even they expected. *Hammer* first tried to catch up with them in LA, then New York and finally settled on Japan – all in the span of a few days. Life, for them, is moving pretty fast. They can hardly believe it themselves. "I almost forgot we were in Japan," chuckles drummer Bob Bryar.

HOW IS JAPAN?

GERARD WAY: "I love Japan. It's amazing. I'm just really excited to be back on tour again. That's just, you know… I've been looking forward to starting this tour for quite some time."

BOB BRYAR: "It's going really well. We've played the new record everywhere now and it's going well wherever we go. It's just weird to see. It's awesome. It was kind of a risk putting this out!"

WERE THERE POINTS WHERE YOU DOUBTED HOW THE BLACK PARADE WOULD BE RECEIVED?

GERARD: "I had these Frankenstein moments like that once or twice a week, where I was asking myself, 'Am I nuts?' I needed confirmation from somebody that had showered in maybe a week that could tell me I'm OK, and that we're doing the right thing, and that we're not fucking crazy… that I wasn't driving us into the sun!"

BOB: "Yeah, we definitely hit a point. We were just out to do something to make us happy. I knew I liked it and it would be special to us, but I didn't want people to go, 'What are these dudes doing?!' Luckily that didn't happen."

"PEOPLE WILL BITCH AND COMPLAIN ABOUT US."

GERARD EXPECTED SOME HATERS

RAY TORO: "While we were in the studio it was all about having fun. The more insane or wacky the idea was, the more likely we were to try it. You tell yourself you don't care but you really do. Of course you want people to like it."
GERARD: "When it was done, I knew that we'd created a monster."

A MONSTER RECORD OR SOMETHING MONSTROUS?

GERARD: "Definitely a monster in a good way, but at the same time it's such a personal monster. This was a really personal record; this is us laying it out there. It changed things. It's not so much that as when I was doing Helena though. That was a lot tougher because I wasn't really ready to deal with my grandmother's death so head-on, and then when we put the record out it was, 'OK, you're going to be dealing with this for the next eight months.' There was no death that spawned this record."
BOB: "It was definitely a challenge to make this. We were grouped with a lot of other bands and this album blindsided a lot of people. It made them re-evaluate us. This is the defining record. This is who we are. We took everything that we had – every idea, every emotion – and we took it to a place that we hadn't been. We cornered ourselves. It's going to be hard to beat this. It'll be a whole new idea… maybe stripped down and raw?"

CONCEPT ALBUMS AREN'T VERY COMMON THESE DAYS.

GERARD: "Setting ourselves apart came naturally. People say, 'You worked really hard to distance yourself.' No, we just worked to do something special and crazy and nuts. But it came more organically. We weren't thinking, 'We can't do it like such-and-such band.' It was, 'We need to do something that's going to blow people's minds.'"
RAY: "We've always tried to mix it up, to change. We've always worried about everything sounding the same. It's the records that stand out that really excite us."
BOB: "You can tell some bands were in the studio going, 'OK, here's our single, now let's fill out the rest of the record.' And there's bands putting out records they're calling concept records but there's no concept there. Our record has everything."

IT SOUNDS LIKE AN EXHAUSTING PROCESS. WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN?

GERARD: "That's a good question! I actually don't know if I'd be able to do it again. It was totally draining and painful. I mean, it was super fun but physically it was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. Going to bed at 6am, waking up four hours later and doing it all again. That was every day. I was constantly obsessing over the record, not just musically but all the visual stuff that went along with it. That stuff took so long because we could never just bang out a record, put a collection of songs out. We can't just do that."

SUCCESS OFTEN BREEDS CONCEIT. HOW HAVE YOU STAYED ROOTED?

RAY: "You have that core group of friends – your parents, your best friend, your girlfriend – and nothing changes with them. Just because you're doing well, they treat you the same and I love that. You still get shit. I love that too! If I come home late, I want to get shit from my girlfriend. Or I want to get yelled at by my mom because I haven't called in a couple of days. That's what keeps you normal."
GERARD: "I've made it a habit, along with the other guys, of avoiding really conventional things like those LA parties. We don't really mix well with those things so we don't go to them. I feel pretty normal still. When I come off tour it takes me a good three or four days, but then three or four days go by and I don't even remember I'm in the band. It's really strange. Actually, the weirdest thing that happened was after the last tour when I went to Portland, Oregon for about a week and just holed up in a hotel room. I did a bunch of writing – this is just before Christmas – and about four or five days in I felt completely back to normal. Almost as if My Chemical Romance was a total dream and I wasn't even sure it had happened."
BOB: "We're not going out to big parties to judge other people, that kind of bullshit. The only time where this all feels like too much is when people pry into our personal lives. People go, 'Oh, I found this picture of you in grade school…'"

HAS THAT HAPPENED?

BOB: "Yeah, we've all had it. People will find our yearbooks. Gerard and Mikey have had people outside of their house. I've had kids outside my house. We did a signing in Chicago one time and a few kids came by with pictures they took of my house and asked me to sign them. I was like, 'Why would you show this to me? This is weird.' My mom is a waitress, and they somehow found that out and they'll go eat and request her. That's going a little bit too far."

DO YOU MISS YOUR ANONYMITY?

GERARD: "Yeah. But you get an interview like this and it makes it easier because it's stuff I want to talk about. And there's a few guys who we've built a relationship with. That's not anything to bitch about – that people want to read what I say. But my hair has nothing to do with what I want to say. It's the needless fucking celebrity bullshit that make it a grind."

BUT YOU'RE APPROACHING CELEBRITY STATUS YOURSELF.

GERARD: "It's funny, I was seeing somebody who called me the most confident person with the least amount of self-esteem ever. I'm extremely confident, I believe in myself, but I'm also self-deprecating to the point of humour. If I was saying, 'Yeah, my shit don't

MCR'S LITTLE BLACK BOOK

If you think the words 'special' and 'edition' simply mean a few bonus tracks and some spare minutes of live footage thrown in as a so-called 'bonus', My Chemical Romance's special edition *Black Parade* release blew all competition out of the water.

With a 64-page booklet featuring Gerard Way's own haunting illustrations tying the story concept of *The Black Parade* to images that bespeak the singer's vast but morbid imagination, this was truly something special. The same way the album tells the story of a character known only as The Patient facing a potentially untimely death, the booklet also tells the story of MCR's own journey in the studio.

"Making a record is a lot like surgery without anesthetic," writes Gerard. "You first need to cut yourself up the middle. Then you have to rip out every single organ, every single part and lay them on a table."

It isn't all so grim, but it candidly documents the lows and highs that are the backdrop to My Chemical Romance's biggest album to date. With stories of exhaustion, doubt and a creative birthing process – one that began in the extravagant surroundings of the Paramour mansion in LA – it charts the creation of every song in exquisite detail.

"I'm glad we actually finished it and I can't wait to tour and play it live," says Gerard. "This is the best and craziest thing that has happened to me and I thank the other four dudes for that. I owe them."

stink,' that'd be faking it, and there's so many people faking it out there. There's a suspension of disbelief you're supposed to have with these people but I don't buy into it. I don't mind being extremely extraordinary onstage, but I'm not going to bullshit people."

There's an inherent defensiveness in these bandmates' tone which suggests that My Chemical Romnce have already had to take more than their share of abuse, but then again, it's hard to imagine that being any real surprise to a group which owes more to the sound and theatricality of classic rock acts like Queen these days than anything you're likely to hear from more recently hatched musicians. There's a candour to Gerard that can't be mistaken for anything other than genuine self-belief, though to some it may seem like arrogance. It may fit into standard clichés about new-found stardom, but perhaps My Chemical Romance really were just having their fun in the studio and inadvertently wrote a hit

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THE CRITICAL REACTION TO *THE BLACK PARADE*? NOT EVERYBODY 'GOT' WHAT YOU WERE DOING...

GERARD: "The critical reaction was just cynicism. I read something saying, 'This is some major label thing and you can tell that the label directs them, yadda yadda yadda.' It's like, what label in the world would dress us like that? Have you seen what we look like lately? Who the hell would dress us like that?! We had people at the label fucking terrified of the way we looked!

"Of course there's jealousy and resentment, but we're really lucky and we're really blessed. I mean, shit happened real fast. It's crazy. We can't stop it. We didn't sell ourselves up the river. We stayed true to our morals and our integrity and we still got huge."

ARE YOU EMBARRASSED BY YOUR GOOD FORTUNE?

GERARD: "Yeah, it's really surreal. It's not that it's embarrassment of it, but it's like, boom! Shit, man! Especially when people feel passionately pissed off at you for achieving so much so fast. We're like, 'Man, shit wasn't my fault! We just worked our fucking asses off!' The way I always saw it is that any resentment or being pissed off with us for having the amount of growth that we've had... it's like, 'How can you get pissed off with that?' What have we done wrong?"

RAY: "We just got very lucky. You can't fault people for getting lucky. We would still be doing this if we were still in a van. We worked our asses off. We haven't stopped in five years. If we're lucky because kids got turned on to it, that's not our fault. We've always stuck to our guns, we've never exploited our fans. It isn't how long it takes, it's how we got here, and I know we got here the right way."

"WHEN IT WAS DONE, WE KNEW WE'D CREATED A MONSTER."

MCR WERE PLAYING FRANKENSTEIN

HAVE YOU HAD A LOT OF ABUSE?

GERARD: "I'll listen to most records and I'd think, 'When was the last time you took a risk?' A lot of people will bitch and complain about us… 'Dude you're still making the same fucking pop-punk record you've been making for 20 years' – what do you fucking expect? Are you that surprised? Are you that bitter about the fact we've done something really sincere and really honest and it's worked out? Isn't that weird? We did the right thing!"

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT BEGRUDGE YOU YOUR SUCCESSES.

BOB: "That's just something that people do. It's just jealousy. Put yourselves in our shoes – we're playing songs we love. What else should we do? Our music connects with people. Any band that wants to go, 'We've been touring for eight years and nothing has happened,' well, that's not our fault. But bands that are bigger than us aren't saying that. Like Green Day. You'd think they would be impossible to be around but they were the nicest band we ever met."

WHEN DID YOU MEET THEM?

BOB: "We did a radio Christmas show about two years ago, I think. They said hi and all of a sudden we got an offer to do their tour. The first day we got there I thought they were going to just throw our shit up on the stage and kick us off at the end and give us a closet to live in. But that totally wasn't what happened. I was sitting in our dressing room and Billie [Joe Armstrong, frontman] came in and sat down next to me and said, 'Hey, how you doing?' He introduced himself like I didn't know who he was!"

DID THAT SET AN EXAMPLE TO YOU?

BOB: "Yeah. Because people will go, 'Wow, I can't believe we're hanging out with you, you guys seem like complete dicks.' I've seen so many bands that get mildly successful and turn into the biggest dicks so I can't blame [those people for thinking that about us]."

GERARD, YOU ONCE TOLD US ABOUT BUMPING INTO IRON MAIDEN'S BRUCE DICKINSON IN NEW YORK…

GERARD: "Yeah! That dude was completely normal. He wasn't trying to uphold this bullshit illusion, and meeting people like that on the way up was good for me to see because it let me know I was doing things the right way. I can't fathom why people see me like I see him, though."

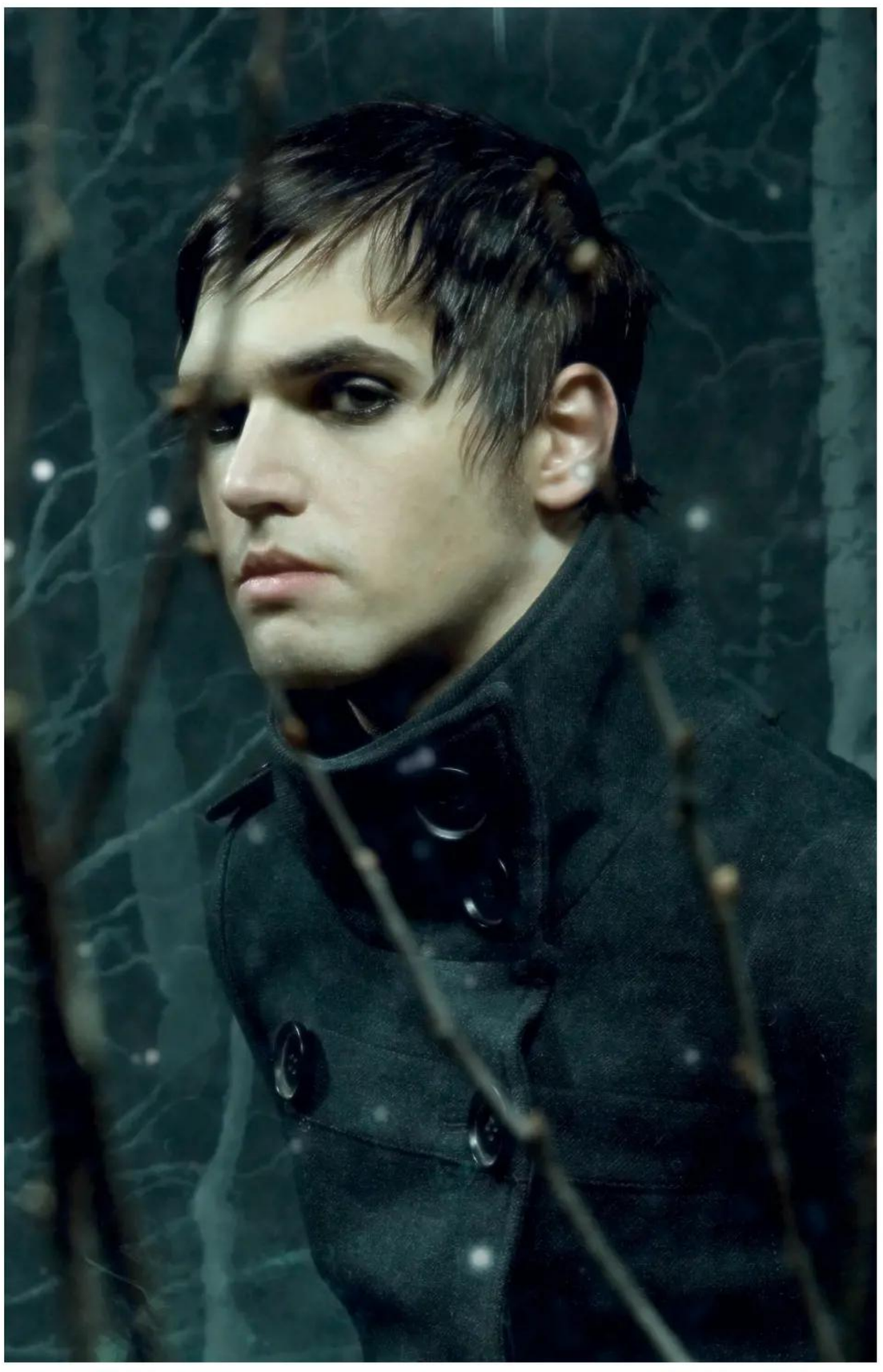
BOB: "We're really nice to fans but as soon as you fuck with us then we are the biggest dicks you've ever seen."

IS THAT WHAT HAPPENED WHEN BERT MCCRACKEN TOLD PEOPLE AT THE WARPED TOUR NOT TO WATCH YOU?

BOB: "Yeah, pretty much! But you've got to take that dude with a grain of salt. You just can't take him seriously. Our reaction to that was getting on the stage and blowing his band completely away."

YOU RE-SHOT THE VIDEO FOR I'M NOT OKAY, WHICH ORIGINALLY PORTRAYED YOUR LIFE ON THE ROAD IN THE EARLY DAYS. ARE YOU NOSTALGIC FOR THOSE MORE INNOCENT TIMES?

GERARD: "There was definitely an innocence period, and that [time in the original video] was about it. Even with Helena, though, that was still there. But the more music we make, the more we've actually started to find more magic in the creation of it. We've gotten more into it, and that's where you start to find the



Gerard (and friends) at the MTV Video Music Awards in New York in 2006.

SCOTT GRIES/GETTY IMAGES

"I WAS ASKING MYSELF, 'AM I NUTS?' I NEEDED CONFIRMATION WE WERE DOING THE RIGHT THING."

EVEN GERARD KNEW THIS WAS A BOLD ADVENTURE

real innocence. If you keep that really pure, it'll stay there and there's nothing that'll touch it, that'll touch the making of the music. Especially if you're never making records to make money and you're not motivated by mortgages or… we all live really humble lives. It'll never affect our music."

BOB: "We've done vans for a long fucking time, and been in positions where we had to hitch rides and sleep on people's floors. We've experienced it. Maybe not as much as some bands have, but it's not like we're out there acting like the biggest rock stars in the world."

RAY: "We're still the same group of guys we were five years ago. But then you think about the places that we used to play compared to now, and that's pretty fucking wild. When you sit down and think about it, you get these, 'Holy fuck!' moments. Like, 'Holy shit, I can't believe we're in Japan playing to loads of kids!' Those quiet moments of reflection, where we think, 'Man, we've done it. We're living the dream.'"

SO WHAT DID HAPPEN TO THE BEATEN-UP OLD VAN THAT YOU USED TO GO ON TOUR IN?

RAY: "I think it's parked on the lawn of one of our old tour managers' house. The first day we got our tour bus, the van was on its deathbed. It was slowly dying – as were we, because the exhaust system was fucked up so it was shooting noxious gas into the cabin! We were passing out and hallucinating. It actually caught fire once while we were driving up to the Warped tour. That was the day we got our bus, 'cos we'd put a lot of miles on that van!"

And with that, My Chemical Romance are off to soundcheck at Tokyo's sold-out Club Citta. It's a fair guess they won't be taking a van to get there, but whether the road ahead of them really stretches as far as they can see is impossible to say. But the enthusiasm and confidence in their voices as they embark on the rest of the biggest tour of their lives seems to suggest that they'd walk if they had to.

DEAN KARR/PRESS

CONCEPTUALLY SPEAKING

The story of The Black Parade is that of a character, The Patient, who's facing an untimely death. So with that in mind, here's another trio of classic concept albums you should 'check out' (see what we did there?)

QUEENSRŸCHE OPERATION MINDCRIME (EMI, 1988)

The story of an ex-heroin addict, Nikki, who falls under the hypnotic control of Dr. X, a member of a cult-like anti-government conspiracy aiming to eradicate society's corrupt leaders – and who intend to use Nikki as their assassin.

IRON MAIDEN SEVENTH SON OF A SEVENTH SON (EMI, 1987)

Inspired by sci-fi great Orson Scott Card's novel *Seventh*, about a child whose magical powers make him the target of evil forces, this Maiden masterpiece is really all about very real mythology that's found in cultures around the world concerning the supposed mystical powers of seventh sons of seventh sons.

PINK FLOYD THE WALL (EMI, 1979)

The big daddy of them all. The surreal story of a disadvantaged misfit named Pink who builds a metaphorical wall around himself to defend against the ills of society – including his own eventual rock-star lifestyle – *The Wall* is a proper rock opera and essential listening.

WE'LL DANCE

Chicago's Fall Out Boy emerged from the punk scene to become emo's crossover heroes. Cue huge hits, celebrity romances, breakdowns and insecurities.

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

Patrick Stump was in full panic mode. The sign in black marker on the front door said 'SOLD OUT', and he had found himself in the middle of a mosh. Surrounded by bodies, tumbling, screaming and pushing in every direction, he couldn't move, he couldn't breathe… and he had a camera pointed at his face.

A gig at Knights Of Colombus, a venue in the Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights, where Stump's band Fall Out Boy were filming the video for their very first single, *Dead On Arrival*, had got completely out of hand. Three songs into the set, the police turned up and shut the show down. "I thought I was going to die," the vocalist and guitarist later told Chicago music TV show, *JBTV*.

Viewed today, *Dead On Arrival*'s video captures the furore that was building around the band at the time. Formed by bassist Pete Wentz and guitarist Joe Trohman in 2001, the duo recruited Stump and later, drummer Andy Hurley, who was renowned on the Chicago punk scene, and signed to independent Florida label, Fueled By Ramen, who released their debut album, *Take This To Your Grave* in 2003.

Fall Out Boy's blend of irresistible melodies and razor sharp hardcore, later dubbed 'softcore' by Wentz, was fizzy and energetic, and they had a killer singer in Stump, whose elastic, honeyed voice had been honed by years of consuming everything from jazz to Christina Aguilera, Prince to Elvis Costello and Earth, Wind & Fire. The band's leader though was Wentz, a good-looking, business-minded local legend in the local Chicago hardcore scene. His angsty, poetic lyrics were whip smart, barbed and romantic. They tackled topics such as relationships and depression, and immediately won Fall Out Boy a fervent audience.

Take This To Your Grave was rush-recorded over just two weeks in Madison, Wisconsin. When it was released in May 2003, initial reviews of the album were lukewarm – in particular, *Rolling Stone* branded it "run-of-the-mill" – but nevertheless, it still gained the band an enthusiastic following. The following summer, along with My Chemical Romance who had released their own debut album, *I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love* in 2002, Fall Out Boy were booked onto US

"IT'S OVERWHELMING WHEN YOU ARE ON THE CUSP OF SOMETHING BIG AND THINKING THAT IT WILL BE A BIG FLOP."

PETE WENTZ

GARY GERSHOFF/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

FALL OUT BOY

“WE WERE A REALLY WEIRD PUNK BAND THAT CAME OUT OF HARDCORE AND RANDOMLY ENDED UP ON TRL.”

PETE WENTZ

travelling pop-punk festival Warped Tour.

“The audiences weren’t huge at this point, but they were so engaged,” said Kevin Lyman, Warped founder and producer, speaking to *Billboard* in 2018.

By the time the band had started work on their second album, *From Under The Cork Tree*, hype around the band had increased to the point that Fueled By Ramen’s major label parent, Island Records, had waded in and signed them up.

“The moment that the band progressed to Island Records was a paradigm shift like no other,” Trohman noted in his memoir, *None Of This Rocks*. The band decamped to California, where they recorded the album at LA’s Burbank Studios. “Everything went into hyperdrive once we started production on what would become our breakthrough album, *From Under The Cork Tree*.”

To an outsider, it seemed everything was falling into place, but Wentz’s long-time depression and anxiety was bubbling back to the surface. In February 2005, mid-way through recording sessions, he took an overdose of anti-anxiety medication, Ativan, while sitting in his car in a Chicago Best Buy carpark and was hospitalised for a week.

“I feel confidence in myself, but at the same time there’s these cracks in the facade and those little things underneath that are unstable,” he told *Rolling Stone* in 2006. *From Under The Cork Tree* track, *7 Minutes in Heaven (Atavan Halen)* is based on the experience. *‘I’m sleeping my way out of this one... I just need a stronger dose...’* sings Stump, giving voice to his bandmate’s experiences.

Wentz has since been frank about the incident to press and fans. “I just wanted to have my head shut up. I didn’t really think about whether I slept or died,” he told *The Independent*. “It is particularly overwhelming when you are on the cusp of doing something very big and thinking that it will be a big flop. I was racked with self-doubt.”

From Under The Cork Tree did not flop. The album was spearheaded by the single *Sugar, We’re Goin’ Down*, one of the year’s biggest songs, which Stump wrote in 10 minutes.

“I was trying to do a straight punk song for

fun," he told *Rolling Stone*. "But there was something about the rhythm of it, where I was like, 'Hmm, that actually might be too good for just a shitty punk song.'"

The band knew straight away they'd created a corker. Drummer Hurley remembers Stump turning to him after recording the vocals. "He was like, 'Yeah, I just got your kid's college tuition paid for.'"

When the album was released in May 2005, it sold 500,000 copies in its first three months. By September, it was certified platinum. More polished than its predecessor, the new material smoothed out the band's hardcore edges, but ramped up the lyrical angst. Wentz's brutally honest lyrics, hanging out his very public relationship melodrama and battles with depression, provided fans with a life-line, a community where they felt validated and represented. In their thousands, they flocked to Myspace and online forums to dissect every line.

Meanwhile, Fall Out Boy were being played on near constant rotation on MTV's flagship show, *Total Request Live*. That summer, they returned to Warped Tour, this time, playing the main stage alongside My Chemical Romance, who were soaring off the back of their own 2004 breakthrough, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge*, while a little known Paramore played lower down the lineup. It was Warped's biggest year; 700,000 kids turned out over 48 shows, more than double the year before and the atmosphere was feverish.

"It was the first time bands had security guards," Senses Fail vocalist Buddy Neilson, recalled to *Billboard*. "Pete Wentz and Gerard Way couldn't get around without them."

"A lot of people are like, 'You went from twenty kids in the room, to thousands,'" Wentz said later that year, during an interview for the band's 2005 DVD, *Bastards Of Young*. "We get [asked] in interviews; how does it feel to be an overnight success? But last year, we toured for 285 days out of the year, and I swear to God we played so many shows to one person it's insane. It built exponentially, for us it wasn't an overnight success."

By 2006, emo had erupted into the mainstream and scene leaders, Fall Out Boy, My Chemical Romance, Panic! At The Disco and Paramore had become superstars. In May, having already completed a sold-out UK tour in January, the band returned to Britain for another tour, this time playing venues that were, in some cases, double the

Left: Patrick Stump and Pete Wentz onstage in 2015, post-comeback.
Below: (from left) Joe Trohman, Patrick Stump, Andy Hurley and Pete Wentz.

LEFT: ADAM BETTCHER/GETTY IMAGES/IHEARTMEDIA

MARC ANDREW DELEY/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

MELISSA GOLDEN/GETTY IMAGES

BELOW: JEFF GENTNER/GETTY IMAGES

Top left: Pete Wentz crowd-surfs at a show. **Left:** Wentz and then-wife Ashlee Simpson in 2009. **Right:** With Taylor Swift in 2016.

"I SWEAR TO GOD WE PLAYED SO MANY SHOWS TO ONE PERSON IT'S INSANE. IT WASN'T AN OVERNIGHT SUCCESS."

PETE WENTZ

size than on the previous tour, including two dates at London's iconic, 4500-capacity Brixton Academy. Later that year, the band received their first Grammy nomination, for Best New Artist (they would eventually lose out to R&B singer John Legend).

Much like grunge and nu metal before it, emo had an recognisable uniform: studded belts, skinny jeans wristbands and fingerless gloves, all topped with violently side parted hair and a sweeping fringe. Pete Wentz jokingly admitted that he travelled with his own hair straightener that required a "thirty-pound industrial converter to work overseas". The bassist had relocated to LA, was dating popstar and MTV darling Ashley Simpson, and had achieved a level of celebrity that saw him hounded by paparazzi on a daily basis. A few years later a picture of him strutting down the street while a starstruck-looking Bruno Mars started after him would become a viral meme.

While he had never shied away from discussing his private life in public through his lyrics, later that year a boundary was crossed. In one of the earliest cases of its kind, a nude selfie of Wentz was leaked online, an experience the band later poked fun at in the video for their single, *This Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race*, but which he would eventually describe as violating.

"There was a point where I thought, if these are the terms that we do this band on, I don't want to do this band," he later said in an interview with *The Guardian*. "I felt like my privacy had been invaded."

Alternative music has always had an uncomfortable relationship with the concept of 'selling out' and emo was no different. But, in direct contradiction to the scene's insular tendencies, Wentz had his eye on the bigger

picture. By 2006, he had turned himself into a kind of emo mogul, plugging his clothing brand, Clandestine Industries, and talking up Fall Out Boy "the brand" in interviews, an entrepreneurship spirit that was more hip-hop than rock. "You're going to eat, sleep and breathe it," he told *Rolling Stone*. "I want it to be a way you think about the world."

In 2005, he and Patrick had founded their own record label, Decaydance Records, signing an emerging Panic! At The Disco and putting out the Las Vegas band's debut record, *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* – a move that was as savvy as it was cynical. "People are going to be piggybacking bands off of us," he said. "Somebody's going to be pulling those strings, why would it not be me?"

By the time Fall Out Boy released their third album, 2007's career highlight, *Infinity On High*, they had transcended emo altogether. Not only did the album introduce a shift away from punk to pop-rock, Jay-Z put in a guest rap on the album's opening track, *Thriller*. When Kanye West offered to remix single, *This Ain't A Scene...*, Wentz went over to his house where they ate tacos and played board games. On its release, *Infinity On High* landed at No.1 on the Billboard chart, selling over 260,000 copies in its first week. It's the band's best album to date, a bona fide, no-skip album of wall-to-wall bangers.

Fall Out Boy were so successful, they could go in any direction they liked, which is exactly what they did – 2008's ambitious, jazz and funk-indebted *Folie Á Deux* mostly side-stepped emo completely, baffled their fan base and was largely panned by critics. Ahead of its time, it's taken longer for that album to have the reappraisal it deserves, but there's no doubting the immediate and impact Fall Out Boy's earlier material has had on the alternative scene. The immense influence of their first three albums can be heard today in the work of new artists, from Pink Shift to Olivia Rodrigo, Yungblud and Lil Uzi Vert. More than two decades since they emerged from the broiling underground, one of the last rock bands to truly conquer the world have once again captured the zeitgeist.

"We were a really weird punk band that came out of hardcore, randomly ended up on TRL and were shot into this vortex of [the mainstream]," Wentz told the *NME* in 2023. "I'm just so happy we made it out as the same four guys. I'm most proud we exist 20 years in and we're talking about music we made this year. That's pretty cool."

be wild.

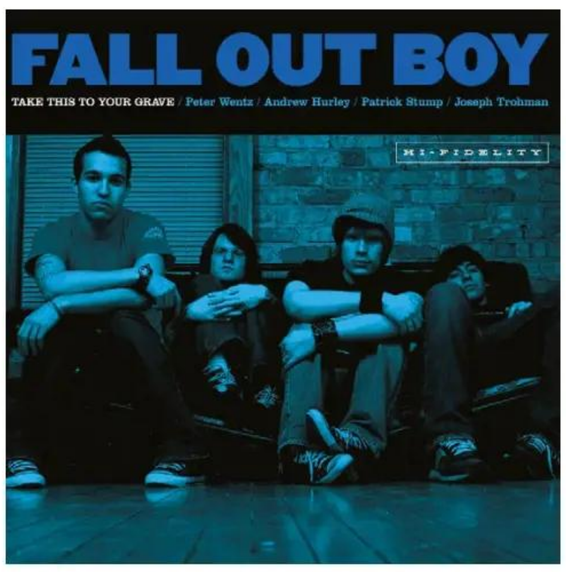
FALL OUT BOY

TAKE THIS TO YOUR GRAVE 2003
FROM UNDER THE CORK TREE 2005
INFINITY ON HIGH 2007

Revisiting Pete Wentz and co's career-defining albums.

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

Few bands did teenage angst as well as Fall Out Boy. *"Tell That Mick He Just Made My List Of Things To Do Today"*, the opening track on the band's debut album, *Take This To Your Grave*, begins with a dial tone, followed by a crunchy, hardcore-inspired riff and a chorus that bleeds like a broken heart freshly dumped over the phone: *'I wouldn't piss to put you out / Stop burning bridges and drive off them.'* It is one of the most emo things you can imagine. *Take This To Your Grave* received a lukewarm reception on its release, but time has served it well. Along with My Chemical Romance's 2002 debut, *You Brought Me Your Bullets, I Brought You My Love*, Fall Out Boy's debut is now considered one of the first records to usher in the noughties emo boom.



Recorded at producer Butch Vig's Smart Studios in Wisconsin, one of the studios where Nirvana recorded *Nevermind*, the sessions for *Take This To Your Grave* were far from glamourous. "We had to sleep on a girl's floor who we didn't even know – we had just met her when we got there – for two weeks," said bassist Pete Wentz. "We ran out of cash halfway through the process. The studio would buy a six-pack of Sprite and a six-pack of Coke per week for us. So, we asked them if they could buy us peanut butter and jelly instead. That's how we lived."

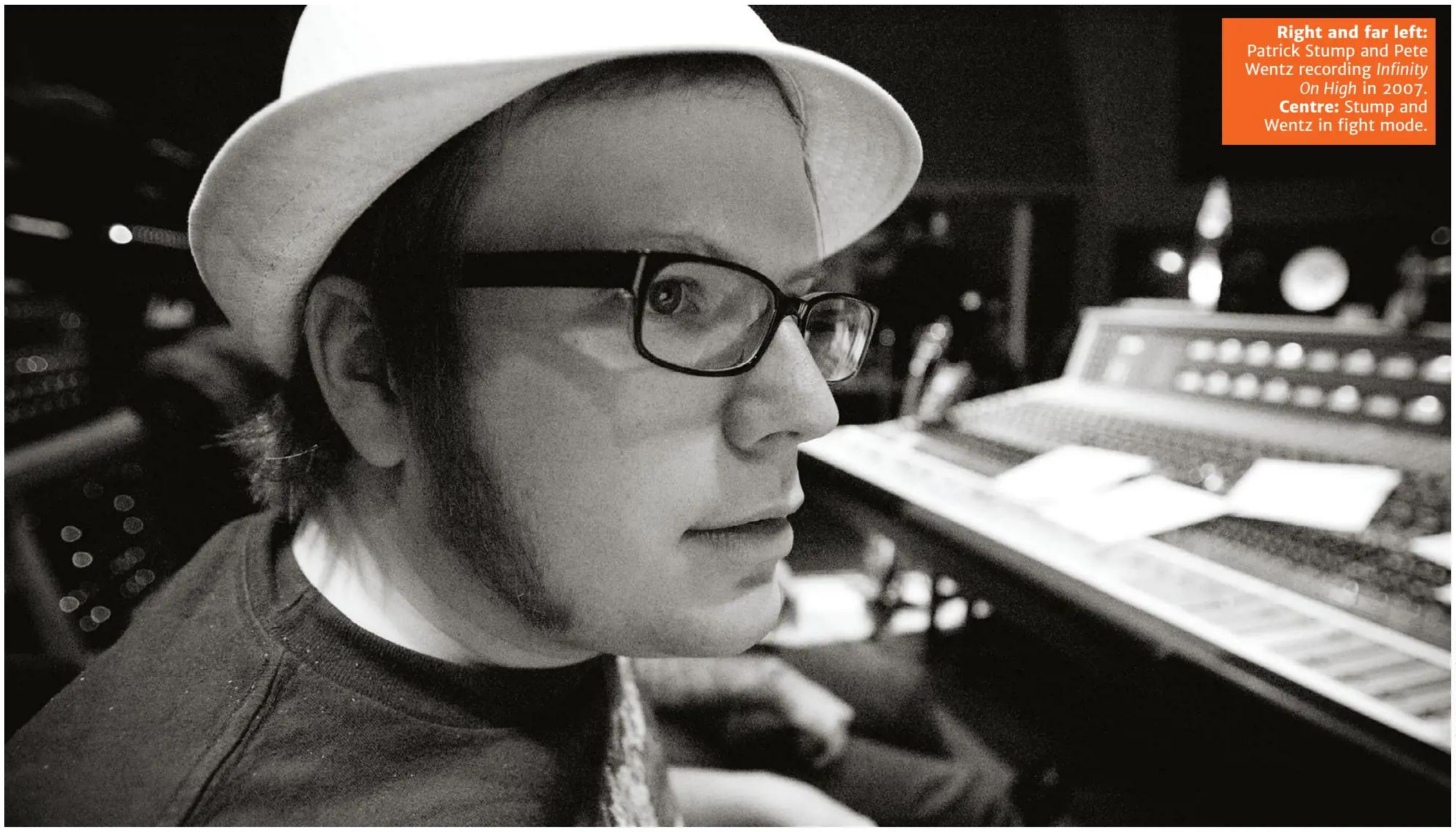
The album was rush-recorded over two weeks, and that urgency is palpable. The band's pop punk is breathless and taunt; tracks like *Dead On Arrival*, *Grand Theft Autumn/ Where Is Your Boy* and *Saturday* sparkle and fizz. While the album introduced a new generation of alternative fans to Wentz's quick-witted lyricism and the golden pipes of vocalist Patrick Stump. Released by Florida indie label, Fueled By Ramen, it's the sound of a band with nothing to lose and everything to play for.

Furthermore, it got Fall Out Boy on the radar of major label, Island Records, who signed them ahead of their second album, *From Under The Cork Tree*. The band camped to LA recording sessions, which were strained and difficult. After moving into what Wentz described as "depressing" corporate housing in LA, half-way through the sessions, the bassist –struggling with anxiety and depression – took an overdose in a Best Buy car park, recovering for a week in hospital. Furthermore, New Found Glory producer Neal ➤

TAKE THIS TO YOUR GRAVE

Released: May 2003
Personnel: Patrick Stump (vocals/guitar), Pete Wentz (bass), Joe Trohman (guitar), Andy Hurley (drums)
Peak chart position: No.98 (UK), No. 140 (US)
Tracklisting:
"Tell That Mick He Just Made My List Of Things To Do Today"
Dead On Arrival
Grand Theft Autumn/Where Is Your Boy
Saturday
Homesick At Space Camp
Sending Postcards From A Plane Crash (Wish You Were Here)
Chicago Is So Two Years Ago
The Pros and Cons Of Breathing
Grenade Jumper (Featuring Jeff Warren)
Calm Before The Storm
Reinventing The Wheel To Run Myself Over
The Patron Saint Of Liars And Fakes

NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY



Right and far left: Patrick Stump and Pete Wentz recording *Infinity On High* in 2007. **Centre:** Stump and Wentz in fight mode.

NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

Avron, who the band drafted in to achieve a chunkier sound, didn't initially want to work with them. "I got the… *Cork Tree* demos from their A&R person Rob Stevenson and they were very rough-sounding," Avron later told *Kerrang!*.

He told them to come back with some better songs – which is exactly what they did, sending over the demos of *Dance, Dance* and *Sugar, We're Goin' Down*, two tracks that would become megahits the following year.

Cork Tree posed a slight sonic shift for the band, ironing out their spikier edges for something smoother, meatier but more anthemic. It was the first album where Stump wrote all the music and Wentz all the lyrics, a dynamic they've stuck with ever since. Their Lennon/McCartney partnership for the Myspace generation was tumultuous: the pair frequently locked horns, actually coming to blows after Wentz requested too many rewrites of the *Sugar, We're Goin' Down* chorus. Wentz had a point though – the song would become the album's lead single and, accompanied by its video of a lovelorn boy with antlers, it turned Fall Out Boy into one of the biggest bands on the planet. When they played Warped Tour summer 2005, it hit home just how crazy things had become. "Our tour bus was in the public parking lot and there was one day when you could go outside, and the next day you just couldn't go outside," recalled Wentz. Five months after the album's elease, it had sold over a million copies, catapulting them into arenas, earning them a Grammy nomination for Best New Artist and inspiring a gazillion bands artists in its wake. Wentz later told *NME*: "I have such reverence for those songs because they feel bigger than our band."

That dizzying ascent to superstardom was dissected on their third album, and career best, *Infinity On High*. The success of *From Under The Cork Tree* had taken everyone by surprise, but this time around, the stakes were high. Neal Avron, who once again joined on production

"YEARS FROM NOW, WHEN I'M LAYING IN SOME GUTTER SOMEWHERE, JAY-Z WILL STILL BE ON *INFINITY ON HIGH*."

PETE WENTZ

FROM UNDER THE CORK TREE

Released: May 2005
Personnel: Patrick Stump, Pete Wentz, Joe Trohman, Andy Hurley
Peak chart position: No.12 (UK), No. 9 (US)
Tracklisting:

Our Lawyer Made Us Change The Name Of This Song So We Wouldn't Get Sued

Of All The Gin Joints In All The World

Dance, Dance

Sugar, We're Goin Down

Nobody Puts Baby In The Corner

I've Got A Dark Alley And A Bad Idea That Says You Should Shut Your Mouth (Summer Song)

7 Minutes In Heaven (Atavan Halen)

Sophomore Slump Or Comeback Of The Year

Champagne For My Real Friends, Real Pain For My Sham Friends

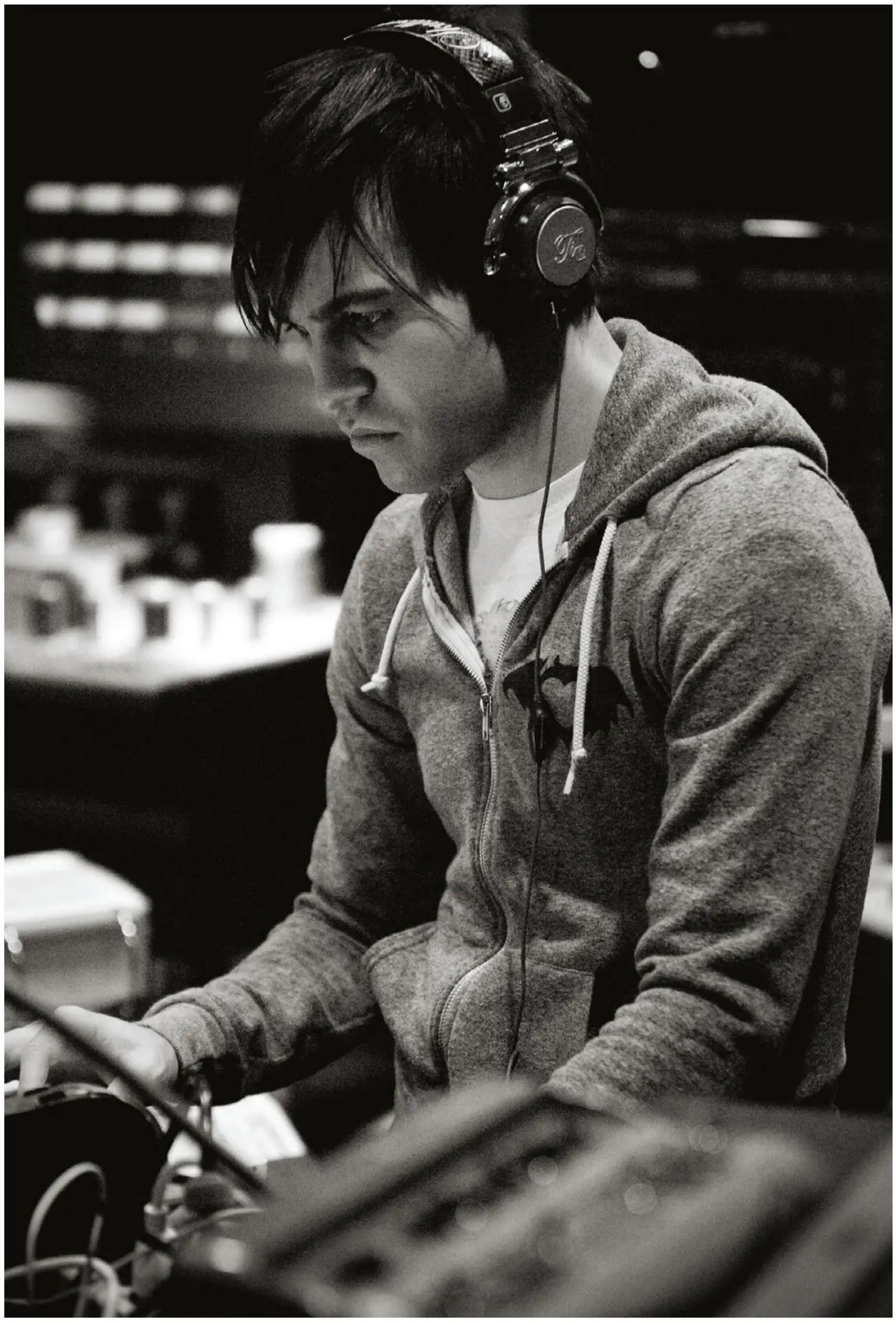
I Slept With Someone In Fall Out Boy And All I Got Was This Stupid Song Written About Me

A Little Less Sixteen Candles, A Little More "Touch Me"

Get Busy Living Or Get Busy Dying (Do Your Part To Save The Scene And Stop Going To Shows)

XO

NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY



NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

INFINITY ON HIGH

Released: February 2007
Personnel: Patrick Stump, Pete Wentz, Joe Trohman, Andy Hurley
Peak chart position: No.3 (UK), No. 1 (US)
Tracklisting:
Thriller (Featuring Jay-Z)
"The Take Over, The Breaks Over"
This Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race
I'm Like A Lawyer With The Way I'm Always Trying to Get You Off (Me & You)
Hum Hallelujah
Golden
Thnks Fr Th Mmrs
Don't You Know Who I Think I Am?
The (After) Life Of The Party
The Carpal Tunnel Of Love
Bang The Doldrums
Fame < Infamy
You're Crashing, But You're No Wave
I've Got All This Ringing In My Ears And None On My Fingers

duties, remembers the atmosphere in the recording studio. "It was a little different. [Pete's personal life] was the big deal on [*Cork Tree*] and it also moved into the third record, but on *Infinity*, he was [being chased by] paparazzi. I think we did pre-production entirely in Chicago partially to stay away from that, and the studio was a little more secluded for that purpose as well."

Pete had spent the first two records spurned and sparring at past lovers, but on *Infinity*, he turned his pen to the pitfalls of success. *On I'm Like a Lawyer With The Way I'm Always Trying To Get You Off (Me & You)*, Stump sings: *'We're the new face of failure / Prettier and younger but not any better off / Bulletproof loneliness at best.'* Meanwhile, on opener *Thriller* – featuring high-profile guest Jay-Z – he reckoned: *'Every dotcom's refreshing for a journal update.'* By this point, Fall Out Boy were the most successful band to have emerged from the emo scene, but it was also the moment they left the genre behind.

Musically, *Infinity On High* is bigger amd slicker. Inspired by pop and hip hop, it's an album of back-to-back bangers that reflects the band's giant leap into mainstream rock. That the record starts with a guest rap by Jay-Z is testament to just how huge their reach was at the time. "It's a snapshot of where we are right now," Wentz said. "And years from now, when I'm laying in some gutter somewhere, Jay-Z will still be on this record."

THE 10 BEST FALL OUT BOY SONGS

FOB bassist Pete Wentz picks his band's best songs, from the big hits to the deep cuts.

WORDS: THEA DE GALLIER

From their beginnings as an angsty emo four-piece at the turn of the millennium, Fall Out Boy rose to become a genuine phenomenon. With their often-ambiguous lyrics and playful videos, they've become stalwarts of pop-punk, even with their recent shift towards stadium-ready pop-rock. In 2018, bassist and chief lyricist Pete Wentz talked through his 10 favourite FOB tracks, from the hits to the ones that almost didn't happen.

SATURDAY
(Take This To Your Grave, 2003)

Pete: "This one's off our first album and it's what we close every show with. It's kind of like the peace sign; peace and we're out. We've been doing it since the start of the band and now we play in amphitheatres and arenas but we still do it, so it's cool to have one landmark thing that hasn't changed."

THIS AIN'T A SCENE, IT'S AN ARMS RACE
(Infinity On High, 2007)

Pete: "This probably shouldn't have been a single on pop radio because it was such a weird song, but it somehow works. The video was a lot of fun to shoot, too – we just took the piss out of what everybody thought our lives were like."

THANKS FR THE MMRS
(Infinity On High, 2007)

Pete: "When we made the demo, it didn't sound anything like the finished product. We watched the movie *Josie And The Pussycats*, and there's rock music in it, but it's really bizarre; it's like punk music, but you can tell that a pop person had been involved. The guy behind it was an American producer called Babyface, so working with him was almost like Babyface doing a Bon Jovi song. His input is the only reason that song turned out the way it did. And making the video was literally bananas – there were monkeys in it."

I DON'T CARE
(Folie à Deux, 2008)

Pete: "This was a fun song to make and was kind of like an ode to narcissism. It played on the idea of the selfie – the culture of 'I don't care what you think, as long as it's about me.'"

SHE'S MY WINONA
(Folie à Deux, 2008)

Pete: "This wasn't a single, and the album it's from, *Folie à Deux*, wasn't our most popular album. The record was made before I had my son, and this song was me wondering what [fatherhood] would be like. I was thinking,

ANDY WILLSHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES LEFT: GILBERT CARRASQUILLO/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

“*I DON’T CARE* PLAYED ON THE IDEA OF THE SELFIE – THE CULTURE OF ‘I DON’T CARE WHAT YOU THINK, AS LONG AS IT’S ABOUT ME.’”

PETE WENTZ

Left: Pete Wentz in the recording studio. **Right:** Fall Out Boy go for the knockout.

RIGHT: NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES

SUGAR, WE'RE GOIN' DOWN

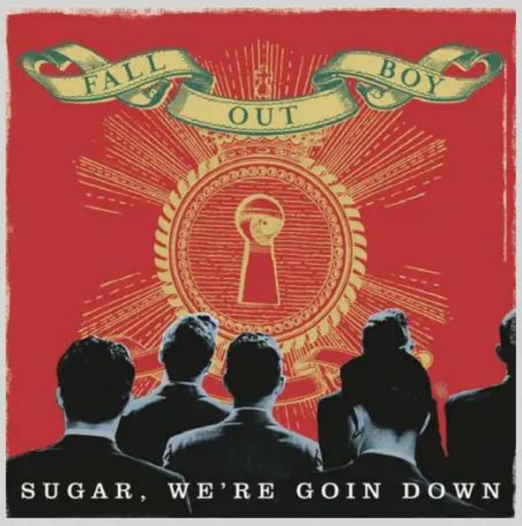
(From Under The Cork Tree, 2005)

Pete: "We started writing *Sugar*... when we were in Chicago, in a little practice space, but we didn't get it right. There are so many iterations of this song, and a lot of them are kind of bad. There was a version that sounded to me a little bit like how *America's Suitehearts* ended up sounding – not totally, but a little bit. That vibe.

"So we started writing it, we had a bunch of demos, and our label was like, 'You guys need a real producer'… but no real producers wanted to work with us. We ended up getting Neal Avron, who we'd always wanted to work with. We kind of begged him and begged him. So we flew to California and played him a version of that song.

"He liked it, but again, it wasn't compelling enough to anybody. Patrick [Stump, vocalist] had played this one version of it in a practice space in California, and I was like, 'That one!', but he couldn't remember it and kept going back to other versions. It was like an idea you come up with in a dream and can almost put your finger on, but not quite.

"Luckily, he did figure it out in the end. Back then, though, we fought with each other a lot. All Patrick cared about was the way the melody sounded and all I cared about was the words, so we really fought over cramming these words in.



"Our label was like, 'Oh my god, this chorus has like, way too many words in it, it'll never work!'

"There's no way to cram in *'loaded god complex'* and all these lyrics when you're totally enunciating. If he was enunciating the way that Brandon Flowers does, it would probably sound crazy. I think that he naturally sang like that anyway, so it really worked out. He wanted to do long, big notes where he'd never fully close his mouth, so it led to this Sia effect. You're like, 'I don't really know what he's saying, but the melody is cool.'

"So it was just one of those songs. He had *Dance, Dance* fully formed, but this one we really had to work on and put together. Both Neal and Tom Lord-Alge, the guy who ended up mixing it, I would heavily credit them both for helping us sonically with that song. It was weird. We wanted tons of guitars and really open guitars, basically mosh guitars. It was a weird song to try and pitch to a major label, but somehow it just worked."

"THERE ARE SO MANY ITERATIONS OF THIS SONG, AND A LOT OF THEM ARE KIND OF BAD."

PETE WENTZ

'Would my life change? Will I feel differently?' I was trying to guess what it would be like. Some of the stuff I got really right, but there are other things about having a child that I couldn't possibly have known."

MY SONGS KNOW WHAT YOU DID IN THE DARK
(Save Rock And Roll, 2013)

Pete: "This was the next incarnation of what *Sugar...* was, and what it meant to us. It was like going to a roulette table and putting it all on one number – we were re-launching our band with this song, and if everyone hated it, it could have been a big problem for our legacy. It was such a bizarre idea; we played it to our friends and some of them were like, 'Why are you trying to put hair metal screams on this song?' I developed a section for it, because before we put it out it was a strange little broken song, so it was cool to see it in stadiums at sports games, because it didn't really begin that way."

IMMORTALS
(Big Hero 6 soundtrack, 2014)

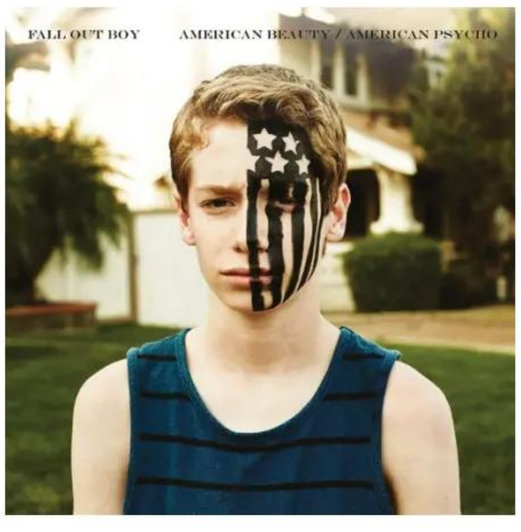
Pete: We wrote this for the movie *Big Hero 6*, which was cool because we went in with the filmmakers and we wrote for a very specific scene. It was such a different songwriting process. It's something my kids can watch as well, which is nice. We saw how Disney really worked, and watching the Disney and Marvel collaboration coming together was really cool."

UMA THURMAN
(American Beauty/American Psycho, 2015)

Pete: "We originally came up with this track while we were on tour. Patrick had this idea, and it ended having a sample from *The Munsters* in it. We started playing it for people, and everyone said, 'Oh my god, it sounds like Quentin Tarantino with the surf guitar.' So we decided to try and write a song based on something Tarantino-ish, and we chose Uma Thurman. I think everyone thinks of *Pulp Fiction*, but to me it's more like her fighting with the samurai sword in *Kill Bill*."

AMERICAN BEAUTY/AMERICAN PSYCHO
(American Beauty/American Psycho, 2015)

Pete: "There are these French DJs that I really like, Brodinsky and Sebastian, who remind me of the 90s punk scene in the US, when were were kids dressed in full punk gear, and mosh pits, and the whole attitude. We reached out to Sebastian and said, 'Let's make a rock'n'roll song that's like a throwback from the future!' So he helped us, and we chopped up some Mötley Crüe guitars. We sampled *Too Fast For Love*; I know Tommy Lee, so we reached out to them, and they were psyched on it. Tommy loves Sebastian. The song was wild; it had to become the title track of the album."



MICHAEL CAULFIELD/AMA 2009/GETTY IMAGES

"There's just something great about being unabashedly comfortable with what makes you feel happy."

In 2019, Pete Wentz talked us through the rise, fall, and rise again of Fall Out Boy.

WORDS: MARIANNE ELOISE

When Fall Out Boy released their first greatest hits album, *Believers Never Die*, in 2009, they were experiencing a full collapse. Exhausted and fighting within themselves after ore than four years of solid recording and touring, the Chicago band played their final show in October 2009, during which Blink-182's Mark Hoppus symbolically shaved bassist Pete Wentz's famous head of hair.

The message was clear: Wentz and his bandmates Patrick Stump, Andy Hurley and Joe Trohman were done. The ensuing four-year hiatus wasn't broken until 2013 and the release of *Save Rock And Roll*, a drastically different record that saw the band doing the impossible: reinventing themselves and kickstarting a successful second coming. With the release of *Believers Never Die Pt. 2* in November 2019, almost 10 years to the day after *Pt. 1*, an onlooker might ask: does this mean another end is in sight?

"There's not an impending hiatus, but there's also not impending new music. I don't know. We don't have anything coming up," says Wentz, over the phone from his home in LA. "There's just nothing on the horizon. We need to figure it out,"

He's in a good mood, and with record label DCD2, a family and new jewellery/apparel brand Ronin to think about, he's keeping busy. He's keen to reiterate that this is nothing like 2009.

"There's so much going on. Music changed so much at the time and our friendships were strained. I think we were just burned out. That doesn't exist in the same way this time."

Most people who know Fall Out Boy divide their work into two distinct timelines: pre- and post-hiatus.

"It makes sense to give some of these eras official starts and ends. It's easier for us to wrap our heads around what all fits where," says Wentz.

Fans and detractors are united by one common truth: that the music released either side of their break is distinctly different. Pre-hiatus, Fall Out Boy's legacy was defined by their attachment to emo and pop punk, despite losing most signs of either by 2008's *Folie à Deux*, with its ballads and theatrics.

SCOTT GRIES/GETTY IMAGES

BELOW: FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES

Save Rock And Roll was Fall Out Boy's most pop album to date, taking their flirtation with the mainstream to new levels. "I definitely know that the stuff post-break doesn't necessarily fit side by side chronologically or art-wise with the earlier stuff," says Wentz. "In some ways you can probably compare the three albums post-hiatus to the three after [2003 debut album] *Take This To Your Grave*."

That style development culminated in 2018's *Mania*, a ridiculously bold album that pushed boundaries, even for them, with sidesteps into reggae and dubstep. "Oh man, *Mania* definitely pushed outside of the era," says Wentz with a laugh.

He wants to make it known, though, that while there's no plans for new music, signalling a hiatus isn't the intention of the new compilation.

Above: Fall Out Boy at MTV's TRL studios in 2005.
Top right: Pete Wentz at the iHeartRadio Music Festival in Las Vegas in 2015.
Below right: FOB with furry friends at 2017's MTV Music Awards.

"IF YOU LOOK BACK ON BANDS LIKE THE BEATLES, THEY'RE CRITICALLY LOVED ARTISTS. BUT A LOT OF THEM STARTED BECAUSE GIRLS REALLY LOVED THEM."

PETE WENTZ

Mania felt so completely ridiculous, so personal – a wish fulfilment on the part of the band to do things that they wanted to do. Fall Out Boy have never made music for anyone else, and Wentz is keen to keep it that way.

"Everyone has such disparate adult lives now, and if we do new Fall Out Boy music it's really got to be purposeful," he says. "I think doing it for the sake of it, nobody needs that if it's just a filler album, it'd be a bummer. I'd rather not make one than do that.

"George Lucas always said *Star Wars* is like poetry," he continues, taking a detour that those who have heard him speak will recognise. He makes *Star Wars* references with an almost compulsive regularity, which makes some sense: there's little to compare Fall Out Boy to in the music world, so he has to pull associations from somewhere. With this particular reference, he's comparing the eras of the franchise to his own work.

"It's so interesting when you're on a

long timeline, because then you can go away from something and come back to it. I'll run into people at the airport and they'll be like, whoa, you guys still make music! Then I'll run into kids at my kids' school and they're like, 'Oh my god, [FOB's 2015 single] *Uma Thurman* is the most important song to me!'" he says of the band's distinct eras. "If *Star Wars* had been those three movies from the 70s and 80s, I don't know if you would debate it all the time."

With the two (so far) eras of Fall Out Boy, there is an almost militant divide between "old" and "new" fans. By the time Fall Out Boy came back, emo had died down, and many fans had disappeared with it. The distinction is something Wentz has found peace with. "On a long enough timeline, you can love some of it and not other parts of it. You can rank it and you can argue with your friends," he says.

Many artists become embittered knowing that they have fans with no interest in hearing their newer work, but Wentz isn't one of them. He understands how that happens.

"It's hard to describe the weight of someone's nostalgia. Where you are, especially at certain ages, the things you're going through, it's hard trying to tell someone why something matters to you. I got into some punk rock when I was 16 and I was going through some stuff, and I don't know if I would like those things in the same way now but at the time it meant so much. The feelings were so visceral."

For many, that nostalgia only underpins a greater fandom. It isn't the only thing bringing fans back to shows: it's just the thing that kickstarted it. In recent years, adults who repressed their teenage loves have started to rediscover them, which has invigorated a revival of interest in 00s emo-associated bands.

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

It's something Wentz has seen, too: "You go to college or wherever and all of a sudden you feel embarrassed of those years. Like you're not cool enough. Then sometimes you go into the real world and the real world isn't always super great, so maybe it's just OK to like some of the stuff that you like? I've noticed that a lot, people come back to it. It's an interesting thing to be a part of. It's a bigger thing than us."

He adds, emphatically: "There's just something great about being unabashedly comfortable with what makes you feel happy and what feels good to you."

It's clear that he's not only spent a lot of time thinking about what he's saying, but that he really believes it.

When Fall Out Boy went on hiatus in 2009, they left behind the broken hearts of their teenage, primarily female, fanbase. With their comeback in 2013, they found that while they'd lost a lot of them, they had gained an entirely new fanbase; albeit a still young, female one.

For Wentz, the obsessive fanaticism that those fans can bring isn't a source of shame, it's one of pride. "If you look back on history, on bands like The Beatles, they're critically loved artists. But a lot of them started because there were people, especially girls, that really loved them. I think that's really cool. I think people will look back on Harry Styles in a similar way," he says.

"I would say that a lot of things that I really like that are critically loved throughout history probably started that way. I think that's great."

He's understanding of where his fans come from because at his heart, he's a nerd, too: beyond *Star Wars*, Fall Out Boy's lyrics are littered with references to films, books, and music. He understands obsession. The band themselves have always been divisive. Initially scoffed at for their fanbase of teenage girls and boys in skinny jeans, they've managed to win the respect of even the hardest of critics.

"That's what drives popularity," he says. "History looks back on it in a different light, but at the time people considered it disqualified. If all these people love it, maybe I have to look at it in a funny way. You should just like what you like."

VIVA LAS VEGAS!!

High-kicking their way out of Sin City, Panic! At The Disco were the point where emo met Broadway – and they had dreams to match.

WORDS: SAM COARE

When Brendon Urie announced the end of Panic! At The Disco on January 24, 2023, he did so with little fanfare. There was no emotion-dripping video message; no soul-bearing 'final interview'; no heart-wrenching farewell song or curtain-dropping final album. There was simply 237 words, typeset in white against a black Instagram feed tile.

"It's been a hell of a journey," Urie opened. "I am going to bring this chapter of my life to an end and put my focus and energy on my family, and with that Panic! At The Disco will be no more," he explained, revealing his impending new fatherhood. "I love you. I appreciate you. Thank you for existing," he closed, signing off with his name and his name alone.

That in itself tells an enormous part of the Panic! At The Disco story –

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

BELOW & RIGHT: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

a journey that saw four high-school age friends get together in the Las Vegas desert to pluck their way through covers of songs by Blink-182, before their meteoric rise coincided with a slow disintegration of personal and creative relationships, eventually leaving Brendon Urie its sole member.

Above: PATD in 2005 (from left) Brendon Urie, Spencer Smith, Ryan Ross, Brent Wilson. **Below and right:** PATD on the set of the video for 2008's *Nine In The Afternoon* single.

"I truly can't put into words how much it has meant to us," Urie wrote in his final statement, speaking perhaps out of turn, perhaps accidentally, for a collective that had long since fallen by the wayside. Because the Panic! At The Disco story is one that can only be seen in stages; configurations, lineups, visions and, crucially, sounds and styles differing along the way. Panic! At The Disco exited stage right as a Brendon Urie's solo project in all but name. But its emo glory years were anything but.

Brendon Urie was the final member to even join the fledgling project from which Panic! At The Disco would be born. Original guitarist and vocalist Ryan Ross and drummer Spencer Smith were classmates at Las Vegas' Bishop Gorman High School, soon inviting their mutual pal and bass player Brent Wilson to join – Wilson, in turn, asked Urie to try out not as a frontman, but a guitarist.

When the quartet had exhausted their interest in bashing out renditions of Blink-182's *All The Small Things* and *What's My Age Again?* in Smith's grandmother's house, they decided to write a couple of songs for themselves, somewhat astonishingly attracting the interest of Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz when they sent him a link to the scrappy recordings via his LiveJournal account. Wentz, having recently released his band's breakthrough *From Under The Cork Tree* album on Fueled By Ramen, quickly made the young quartet his first signing to his FBR label imprint, Decaydance. Panic! At The

Disco were still teenagers; they had never even played a live show.

Nevertheless, debut album *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* – spearheaded by hook-laden rock club dance floor filler *I Write Sins Not Tragedies* – showed why Wentz had such faith in the young band. This faith was repaid in tenfold, too. Reframing pop-punk and emo influences through a filter of pop theatrics and Vegas showmanship, the fantastical results had brought playfulness and vibrancy to the rapidly exploding emo, pop-punk and Warped Tour scene, who loved nothing more than a hot new thing to champion. And boy, did Panic! At The Disco become exactly that. Despite this, it turned out that Panic! At The Disco did not feel at home in such ranks.

"I think emo takes itself too seriously," Ryan Ross would tell *People* magazine in the autumn of 2006, doubling down on his view of the genre in a *Blender* interview that same year: "It's almost an insult [to call us emo]. We've totally exceeded emo, which is so stagnant. Not to be cocky, but those bands aren't thinking outside the box."

Pushback came in the form of follow-up album *Pretty. Odd.*, a sprawling collection of left-field baroque-pop curios that took over two years to create, taking its cues not from Panic!'s scene peers, but instead from The Beach Boys and The Beatles. Gone, for this era, was the exclamation mark in the band's name, a pointed marker of the band's bid to put a full stop on spiky whispers that Panic At The Disco were a mere novelty, a joke, or industry plants who didn't write their own songs, and all the various green-eyed assertions made of successful young musicians with semi-decent haircuts. As far as reinventions go, it was a radical, admirable leap, though one that was also met with its fair share of head-scratching bewilderment and divisions amongst the band's now billowing fanbase.

"WE'VE TOTALLY EXCEEDED EMO, WHICH IS SO STAGNANT. THOSE BANDS AREN'T THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX."

RYAN ROSS

Divisions, too, had long since set in within the Panic! ranks. Wilson had already departed, moved out in somewhat unexplained circumstances with replacement four-stringer Jon Walker stepping into his still-warm seat. It was the new bassist and guitarist Ross who were largely credited with *Pretty. Odd.*'s retro-rock about-turn, which would soon go out the window when the pair took their own leave 18 months after the album's release, citing creative differences with the more pop-leaning Urie. The vocalist and drummer Spencer Smith would soldier on as a duo for 2011's *Vices & Virtues* and, having ➤

been joined full-time by touring bassist Dallon Weekes, 2013's *Too Weird To Live, Too Rare To Die!*, both of which variously stretched the boundaries of Panic!'s ever-evolving pop-rock formula.

Come 2015, Smith would too have departed the band following long-running struggles with addiction, with Weekes creatively sidelined back to his original touring role. Brendon Urie was left holding the can.

The youngest child of five, Brendon Urie grew up in a devout Mormon family. At 17, disillusioned with the church, he would renounce his faith, and informed his dad that he was dropping out of high school in order to focus on music. He was kicked out the familial house, his bandmates becoming his new siblings – and like all siblings, fights are never far away.

"I didn't know how to handle it," Urie said in 2015, of the band's rapid ascension at such a young age. "It was overwhelming. You're basically married to three other people. You're in the most intimate moments of each other's lives, you're with each other all day, every day."

For all the teenage rebellion that would see him stay out all night drinking and smoking, and the flamboyant showmanship he would come to be known for, underneath the skin Brendon Urie was a sensitive, naive, overthinking kid. "In the beginning, when I had a spare second, I would go online and I'd look at comments from fans, good or bad, and I would take 'em to heart," he told me of those early years of fame. "It really broke my psyche down, and broke me down emotionally. The first thought whenever something went wrong was one of despair. I would be devastated by things that happened."

And make no mistake, Urie took the ups and downs of Panic!'s first decade to heart and hard. Finding himself in 2015 without bandmates for the very first time, he faced a choice: let go of the past, or let it consume him. *Death Of A Bachelor*, released in 2016, was the sound of the vocalist emphatically embracing the former. "*Death Of A Bachelor* is me moving forward," he told this writer. "*Death Of A Bachelor* actually means the birth of a new man."

Below: Brendon Urie in 2022.
Left: PATD in 2005.

DEBRA L ROTHENBERG/GETTY IMAGES RIGHT: NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

The new man came with a new sound, too. Described by its creator as a "mix between Sinatra and Queen", *Death Of A Bachelor* was nothing if not flamboyant. "People have told me I don't look the same," Urie crooned on the title track, a velvet-smooth Vegas lounge jazz sketch that was about as far removed from whatever rock roots from which Panic! At The Disco emerged with.

The album went to number one in the US – the first under to appear under the band's banner to do so – and snagged a GRAMMY nomination. More than that, though, *Death Of A Bachelor* marked the first time Panic! At The Disco appeared in the image of Urie and Urie alone. *'Done my time and served my sentence,'* he sang on *Emperor's New Clothes* in reference to "keeping my mouth shut", as he put it, for years as part of the compromising 'band' dynamic. *'I'm taking back the crown / I'm all dressed up and naked / I see what's mine and take it.'*

With the spotlight fixed firmly and solely on him, the mainstream celebrity of Brendon Urie grew exponentially. In 2017, he embarked on

“I AM GOING TO BRING THIS CHAPTER OF MY LIFE TO AN END, AND WITH THAT PANIC! AT THE DISCO WILL BE NO MORE.”

BRENDON URIE

his first role on Broadway as one of the leading stars in *Kinky Boots*; two years later, he’d provide guest vocals to Taylor Swift track *Me!*. Sixth album *Pray For The Wicked* arrived in the between, its front cover artwork seeing a besuited Urie towering over the a city skyline, surveying all that he ruled, which by now included venues as giant as London’s O2 Arena and New York’s Madison Square Garden.

Back in 2006, Panic! At The Disco’s debut bow at Reading festival was greeted by a hail of debris, as was the way of the world back then, which included one heat-seeking projectile that struck Brendon Urie flush in the face and knocked him out cold within seconds of the band stepping onstage. Now, in 2018, Panic At The Disco’s name was appearing at the very same festival alongside the likes of Kendrick Lamar and Post Malone at the very top of the billing. .

Viva Las Vengeance would take four years to arrive – thanks, global pandemic! – but when it did, it was hard to see their seventh full-length record as anything other than an emphatic underlining of Panic! At The Disco and Brendon Urie’s status as bona fide global megastars.

Exhibiting yet further stylistic changes that witnessed Urie embrace and pay homage to his formative ’70s glam rock influences on an album that was recorded – in suitably nostalgic style – live to an 8-track tape machine, lyrically *Viva Las Vengeance!*’s reflective, celebratory mood even found Urie taking moments to toast his own unlikely successes – *‘We signed a record deal at 17 / Hated by every local band / They say we never paid our dues,’* he reminisces on *Local God*, while *Say It Louder* sees the frontman sing: *‘Hey kids, legends and gods / Give them applause / You made it against all odds / Choose your weapon of choice / Your beautiful voice.’*

In typical fashion of a career spent confounding expectations, it wouldn’t even be six months before Brendon Urie released the statement that put a pin in Panic! and drew a line under this chapter in his life, seemingly forever more. In doing so, Panic! At The Disco went out exactly as they’d come in: resolutely on their own terms, the rock world a more colourful, imaginative place for their boundless creativity.

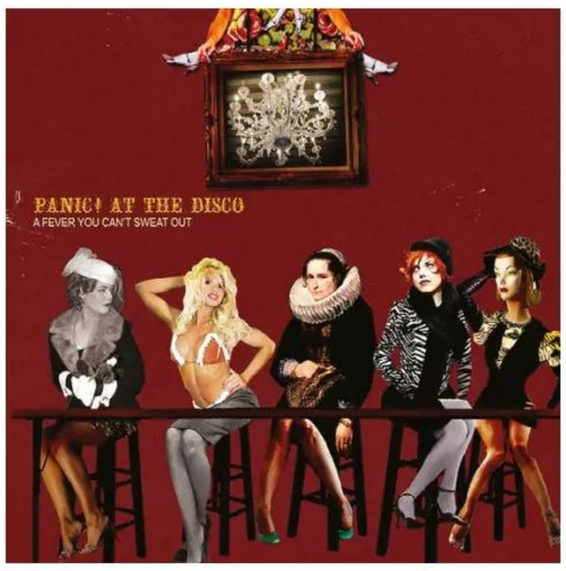
PANIC! AT THE DISCO

A FEVER YOU CAN'T SWEAT OUT 2005
PRETTY. ODD. 2008
VICES & VIRTUES 2011

The evolution of Vegas's finest across their first three albums.

WORDS: SAM COARE

When revisiting Panic! At The Disco's formative material in turn, it says everything to note that each of their first three albums were all made by different iterations of the band's line-up. Few groups in the emo genre – and make no mistake, Panic! At The Disco being drawn into such an orbit is far more spiritual than sonic; a product of scene circumstance and the company they kept as it is anything approaching the band's blueprint – offer such a diverse, dizzying array of styles and sounds. And that's before we even reach the latterday incarnation of Panic! as a Brendon Urie solo band, and the frontman's reinvention as a Sinatra-channelling, Broadway-starring cabaret king.



On the surface, Panic! At The Disco are as much pop-punk, electronica, synth-pop, alternative rock and folk as they are emo. But that, in itself, sums up the Panic! modus operandi from day one: difference by design, an embracing of experimentation.

With its creators barely having swapped their high school uniforms for the vaudevillian stylings that made the band visual as well as audible outliers amongst their peers, 2005's debut album *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* introduced commendably big ideas and intentions from its opening moments. In a scene soon awash with facsimile copies of its biggest players, perhaps the greatest compliment that can be paid to *A Fever...* is that it stands apart from everything else.

The fingerprints of Fall Out Boy bassist Pete Wentz, who made the band his first signing to his new Decaydance label, are evident throughout, not least on the album's FOB-esque word-soup song titles such as *The Only Difference Between Martyrdom And Suicide Is Press Coverage* and *Lying Is The Most Fun A Girl Can Have Without Taking Her Clothes Off*. But the influence of the glitzy showmanship and posturing of the band's Las Vegas hometown is more abundant still, and colours *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* with a theatricality that even My Chemical Romance were still a year removed from fully embracing.

I Constantly Thank God For Esteban and *There's a Good Reason These Tables Are Numbered Honey, You Just Haven't Thought Of It Yet* both peacock around with fantastical swagger; the latter, turns the spotlight from guitar to trumpet, fit for an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical as much as a rock long-player. Breakout single *I Write Sins Not Tragedies*, meanwhile, underlined Panic!'s rock credentials, its chorus propelled by a hooky melody that can still fill club dancefloors all these years later.

Sessions for the album were fraught – *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* was made for

A FEVER YOU CAN'T SWEAT OUT

Released: September 2005
Personnel: Brendon Urie (vocals, piano, keyboards), Ryan Ross (guitar), Spencer Smith (Drums), Brent Wilson (bass)
Peak chart position: No.17 (UK), No.13 (US)
Tracklisting:

Introduction

The Only Difference Between Martyrdom And Suicide Is Press Coverage

London Beckoned Songs About Money Written By Machines

Nails For Breakfast, Tacks For Snacks

Camisado

Time To Dance

Lying Is The Most Fun A Girl Can Have Without Taking Her Clothes Off

Intermission

But It's Better If You Do

I Write Sins Not Tragedies

I Constantly Thank God For Esteban

There's A Good Reason These Tables Are Numbered Honey, You Just Haven't Thought Of It Yet

Build God, Then We'll Talk

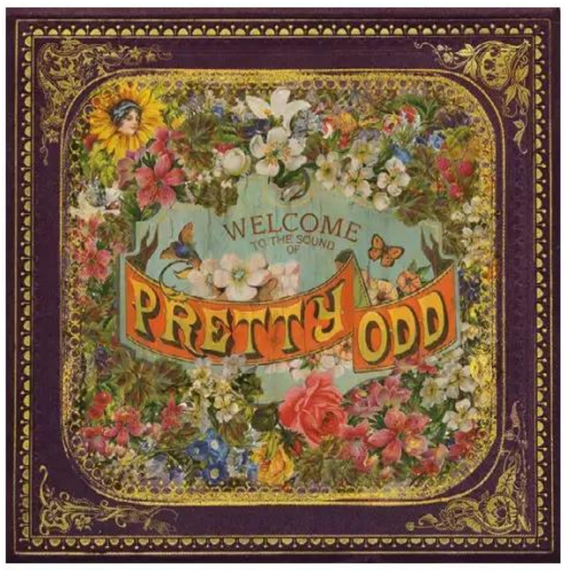
NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

Above: Panic! AtThe Disco circa *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out*. **Right:** playing London in 2009 with touring members Ian Crawford and Dallon Weekes.

ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY

just $11,000, necessitating the band work 12-hour-plus days for four weeks straight, sleeping in one room in bunk beds, literally on top of each other, as respite. You can feel the loss of perspective brought on by cabin fever on songs such as *London Beckoned Songs About Money Written By Machines*, which skirts on the brink of near breathless lyrical collapse, and *Intermission*, a needless, misplaced Europop-meets-*Moulin Rouge* outlier. No matter. *'Give me envy, give me malice, give me your attention,'* sang Brendon Urie on In *The Only Difference Between Martyrdom....A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* would give Panic! At The Disco all three.

It's through such a prism that follow-up *Pretty. Odd*. lived up to its name. Over two years in the making, and with one almost fully completed album, said to be called *Cricket & Clover*, scrapped along the way, *Pretty. Odd.* eschewed the pop-punk leanings of its predecessor in favour of a psych-influenced retro sound. *'You don't have to worry cos we're still the same band,'* sings Urie self-consciously



on opener *We're So Starving*. Whether he was trying to convince himself or the Panic! fanbase, *Pretty. Odd.* made clear that they were anything but.

"We really wanted to show in the music that we were happy, compared to the first album, which is more of an emo album," bassist Jon Walker, who joined PATD in time to play on the album, reflected to *The Ringer* in 2022. "*Pretty. Odd.* was born [as] an exercise in, 'How much fun can we actually have, not over-thinking this and just playing music?'"

'Exuberance' is a word that encapsulates the album. *That Green Gentleman (Things Have Changed)*, *Pas de Cheval* and *The Piano Knows Something I Don't Know* are explosions of baroque indie-pop technicolour. Lead single *Nine In The Afternoon* – the only *Pretty. Odd.* song to survive in latter-day Panic! At The Disco setlists – is blue skies and summer days in its easy-breeziness. As many as 15 additional musicians, playing everything from the flugelhorn to the Wurlitzer, are credited with contributions. *Pretty. Odd.* comes to a close

PRETTY. ODD.

Released: March 2008
Personnel: Brendon Urie, Ryan Ross, Spencer Smith, Jon Walker (bass)
Peak chart position: No.2 (UK), No.2 (US)
Tracklisting:
We're So Starving
Nine In The Afternoon
She's A Handsome Woman
Do You Know What I'm Seeing?
That Green Gentleman (Things Have Changed)
I Have Friends In Holy Spaces
Northern Downpour
When The Day Met The Night
Pas de Cheval
The Piano Knows Something I Don't Know
Behind The Sea
Folkin' Around
She Had The World
From A Mountain In The Middle Of The Cabins
Mad as Rabbits

MARC BROUSSELY/REDFERNS/GETTY

VICES & VIRTUES

Released: March 2011
Personnel: Brendon Urie, Spencer Smith
Peak chart position: No.29 (UK), No.7 (US)
Tracklisting:
The Ballad Of Mona Lisa
Let's Kill Tonight
Hurricane
Memories
Trade Mistakes
Ready To Go (Get Me Out of My Mind)
Always
The Calendar
Sarah Smiles
Nearly Witches (Ever Since We Met...)

with the Beatles-worshipping *Mad As Rabbits* – a fitting descriptor of the quartet responsible for its creation. Sure, *Pretty. Odd.* remains as confounding today as it was upon its release, but it's also the most charming, joyful release in the Panic! At The Disco oeuvre, too.

If *Pretty. Odd.* was a product of a bottling a laissez-faire songwriting attitude, its follow-up, *Vices & Virtues*, is the result of the turmoil that would beset the band in the in the period that followed it. With founding guitarist Ryan Ross and Walker exiting the band 18 months after the release of the second album, citing creative differences, Urie and drummer Spencer Smith's decision to forge ahead as a duo unsurprisingly saw them rowing back on the ambition and retreating somewhat to the safety of the debut album's more simplistic shores. Embracing the spirit of *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* once more, *Vices & Virtues* returns to a focus on emo-inflected power-pop, not so much abandoning as streamlining the excesses of *Pretty. Odd.* into something at once familiar but fresh.

It arrived with a darker edge, too, made apparent from the introductory throes of debut single and album opener *The Ballad Of Mona Lisa*. A spiritual sibling to I *Write Sins Not Tragedies*, its promo even invoked the latter song's iconic music video, reshaping it with a moody, steampunk tone, swapping its original wedding location for a funeral, bright red hues now painted black. As with their debut, this was theatre once more, only this time in the mould of Danny Elfman.

If *Pretty. Odd.* found Panic! At The Disco building their own emo Willy Wonka factory of pure imagination, *Vices & Virtues* laid bare how it felt to get punched in the face by reality. It was during the album's creation that Smith was beginning his own destructive journey of addiction; the insecure Urie, meanwhile, was struggling to come to terms with being thrust into the role of principal songwriter, something reflected in his lyrics. *'Oh, memories, where'd you go? / You were all I've ever known / How I miss yesterday / And how I let it fade away,'* he cries on *Memories*. Elsewhere, *The Calendar* – ostensibly a song about the band's earlier split – opens with the singer deadpanning: *'You said if you don't let it out / You're gonna let it eat you away / I'd rather be a cannibal, baby / Animals like me don't talk anyway.'*

Vices & Virtues may not go down as every Panic! fan's favourite album – it suffers for being not cohesively enough of any one thing. But in forcing Brendon Urie to find his voice and his role not only as Panic! At The Disco's leader, but its saviour, too, it ensured their story would have many more chapters yet to come.

THE 10 BEST PANIC! AT THE DISCO SONGS

In 2016, Brendon Urie talked Louder.com through his favourite PATD tracks.

WORDS: THEA DE GALLIER

TIME TO DANCE
(A Fever You Can't Sweat Out, 2005)

Brendon: "This was the first song I wrote for Panic! At The Disco. When I first joined, I was the guitar player, and this was one that I worked on with everyone. I wasn't yet the singer. Once the album came out and it was my voice singing, it was a huge pivotal moment for me because it was the first time I felt I was part of the band. I'd been in bands before but this was the first time I felt like the part of a group; a part of something special."

I WRITE SINS NOT TRAGEDIES
(A Fever You Can't Sweat Out, 2005)

Brendon: "That's the song that got me to this point. It's the reason I'm talking about me and my music with you. I've got to give credit where it's due. That was the one that took me around the world."

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SEEING?
(Pretty. Odd., 2008)

Brendon: "I remember writing this and watching *Alice In Wonderland* and 'shrooming out of my mind, and being like, 'Oh my God, I'm going to lose my mind' and trying to put what I saw into words. That was an adventure for me, trying to be The Beatles."

MAD AS RABBITS
(Pretty. Odd., 2008)

Brendon: "This one started off as a really slow jam. We all got together to work on it and it grew into this. I jumped over to bass and we switched instruments between us which was really fun to do. How I write a bass part is like Paul McCartney writing a bass part, because he's a frustrated guitarist and he writes guitar lines for bass. That was kind of what I was doing, and it was a lot of fun."

THE BALLAD OF MONA LISA
(Vices & Virtues, 2011)

Brendon: "This came from an idea right after *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* came out. I had the pre-chorus and the chorus ready, so I jumped back through my files and was like, 'Yeah, I've been sitting on it for three years and I'll use it!'."

ALWAYS
(Vices & Virtues, 2011)

Brendon: "I was trying to write a Peter Gabriel song like *In Your Eyes*. I hadn't written a song like that before for a Panic album, and I thought it was really neat because I was doing something new and exciting."

GIRL THAT YOU LOVE
(Too Weird to Live, Too Rare to Die!, 2013)

Brendon: "I was having a lot of fun in the studio doing a lot of production, just creating tracks. I wrote this after I watched *Bronson*, the Nicholas Winding Refn movie about [notorious British prisoner] Charlie Bronson. The soundtrack was all this amazing 80s pop. I was like, 'Man, I really like that stuff!' This was my take on how I felt about that movie."

MISS JACKSON
(Too Weird to Live, Too Rare to Die!, 2013)

Brendon: "Not only was that the first single from this album, it was one I felt so immediately proud of. I'd been sitting on the idea for a while and didn't have all the words finished. I was so frustrated. The idea was to have this actress from the 40s or 50s, and I was going to use her name – I had Marilyn Monroe in mind but it didn't work out. I didn't have the *'Are you nasty?'* part. That came about because I saw a Janet Jackson music video [for the song *Nasty*] and she says, 'Miss Jackson, if you're nasty…'. I thought, 'There it is!' It all clicked."

DEATH OF A BACHELOR
(Death of a Bachelor, 2016)

Brendon: "I'm such a huge fan of Sinatra, and I felt that really portrayed the idea of Sinatra in a more modern setting in terms of the sound of the song."

DON'T THREATEN ME WITH A GOOD TIME
(Death of a Bachelor, 2016)

Brendon: "I've always wanted to write a party song. Not just a song that you can party to, but a song describing the things that you experience at a party, or hope to experience. So there's a lot of jumping around and trying to figure out fun ways to describe a debauched night. I'm so glad I got to use the [B-52's] *Rock Lobster* sample, too."

“I REMEMBER WRITING IT AND WATCHING ALICE IN WONDERLAND, ’SHROOMING OUT OF MY MIND.’

BRENDON URIE

WALTER MCBRIDE/GETTY IMAGES LEFT: JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

EMO PANIC!

How My Chemical Romance and their fans got caught up in a sensationalised tabloid storm.

WORDS: SAM COARE

For as long as pop culture has existed, there have been people fearful of its role in corrupting the youth and leading to societal breakdown. Jazz and blues; video games; horror movies; heavy metal; comic books… all have spent time as the subject of moral panics in the crosshairs of the world's self-appointed moral entrepreneurs. And in the 2000s, it was the turn of emo.

The explosion in youth popularity that greeted emo in the early and mid-2000s made it an obvious target for those who found fear in what they couldn't understand. Here arrived a movement with its own sound, look, mood, and language – a dangerous cocktail if ever there was one, some would say.

Where fanaticism exists, you can be sure tabloid interest isn't far behind. In 2006, the *Daily Mail* published the first of a series of infamous articles about the "emo cult", which is described as "a celebration of self harm" in which "emos exchange competitive messages on their teenage websites about the scars on their wrists and how best to display them."

It was its 2008 article headlined "Why no child is safe from the sinister cult of emo" that really brought matters to a head, however. Published in the wake of the suicide of 13-year-old girl named Hannah Bond, the article built on comments from coroner Roger Sykes, who found it "very concerning" that Bond was an "aficionado of the emo fad". The *Daily Mail* ludicrously claimed that Hannah and fellow fans of emo were obsessed with an afterlife known as "the black parade", accusing, in another article, the band My Chemical Romance of "glamorising suicide".

Alarmingly, they were not alone in such absurd views at the time. In Mexico in the same year, the Movimiento Anti Emosexual brought violent attacks against members of the emo subculture, who they saw as an inherent threat to masculinity and heterosexuality. The assaults led to counter-protests across the country.

In Russia, meanwhile, the proposed Government Strategy In The Sphere Of Spiritual And Ethical Education bill sought to crush "dangerous teen trends" by "heavily regulat[ing] emo websites and ban[ning] emo and goth dress style".

"Of course, there are emo teens who just listen to their music," co-author of the proposed legislation Igor Ponkin was reported as saying. "Our actions are not directed at them but rather at those who also hurt themselves, commit suicide and promote those acts." The bill did not pass into law.

As for the *Daily Mail*, the tabloid would defend its article in the face of a widespread outcry, claiming its reporting was "balanced, restrained and above all, in the public interest", despite hundreds of My Chemical Romance fans congregating in London in protest at their coverage. Taking to the stage at Reading festival months later, frontman Gerard Way led a chant of 'Fuck the *Daily Mail!*', while underlining that "nothing is worth hurting yourself over. Nothing is worth taking your life over."

"The message and theme of our album *The Black Parade* is hope and courage," the band said in a statement following Bond's death. "Our lyrics are about finding the strength to keep living through pain and hard times. The last song on our album states: 'I am not afraid to keep on living' – a sentiment that embodies the band's position on hardships we all face as human beings."

Attention soon turned to different targets and other moral panics – but the stereotypes created during the so-called 'war on emo' live on, and remind us of the importance of inclusivity, acceptance and celebration of the differences that make our world so vibrant.

"OUR LYRICS ARE ABOUT FINDING THE STRENGTH TO KEEP LIVING THROUGH PAIN AND HARD TIMES."

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE IN A STATEMENT

PRESS

PARAMORE

Hayley Williams is one of emo's most defiant and inspirational icons. But as the T-shirt says: 'Paramore is a band'.

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

Staring at a printout of the day's schedule, Paramore vocalist Hayley Williams lets out a scream that's equal parts excitement and terror. Warped Tour, the travelling US summer festival where set times are revealed the morning of the show, has pulled into the band's hometown of Nashville and in a few hours, Paramore will be playing a primetime slot on the main stage. It's been less than a year since the band put out their 2005 debut album, *All We Know Is Falling*.

"I'm pretty nervous now. I'm scared the stage will be this big and the crowd will be this big," Williams says, while motioning wildly with her arms. "How did we do this? How did we get this?!"

So fearful that no-one would come to watch them play, she and her bandmates chalked up pavements around the Starwood Amphitheatre, advertising their band name and set time in huge font. They needn't have worried – Paramore pulled one of the largest crowds of the day. Williams, dressed in a purple dress, her orange hair a halo of flame, thrashed her way through the set of exuberant pop punk, while a sea of people bellowed back every word.

The noughties emo explosion was already in full swing by the time Paramore joined the party. They released *All We Know Is Falling* in a vintage year for the scene – alongside Fall Out Boy's *From Under The Cork Tree*, *Commit This To Memory* by Motion City Soundtrack, *Almost Here* by The Academy Is..., and Panic! At The Disco's debut, *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* – putting them firmly in the 'one to watch' bracket.

The band had formed when a 15-year old Williams moved home and subsequently met ➤

THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

RIOT

GIRL!

Left: Hayley Williams onstage in 2023. **Below Right:** Paramore circa *Riot!* (from left) Jeremy Davis, Josh Farro, Hayley Williams and Zac Farro.

"I HOPE NO YOUNG FEMALE EXPERIENCES THE SHIT THAT I EXPERIENCED."

HAYLEY WILLIAMS

guitarist Josh Farro and his brother, drummer Zac Farro, at school in Franklin, Tennessee. Joined by bassist Jeremy Davis, together the group created jubilant pop punk that was fizzy as sherbet and had Christian undertones, set apart by Williams' powerful vocal and her magnetic stage presence.

From the very beginning, they had shown a precociousness and confidence well beyond their years. One of their earliest on-camera interviews took place during Warped Tour 2005 where, sprawled on the grass at Orlando's Tinker Field, a 16-year-old Hayley and 15-year old then-guitarist Jason Bynum, were asked if it was intimidating being on a lineup, which included established bands, Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance.

"No it's not," shrugged a remarkably calm Williams. "We're having fun and all the bands have been super nice to us."

It was Paramore's second album, 2007's *Riot!*, that turned them into superstars. As they headed into the studio to begin recording, the band were unaware of the steep upward trajectory their lives were about to take. "We were just kids before *Riot!* came out," Williams recalled to Track Seven in 2017. "In fact, we were kids for a long time after that! I have a distinct memory – in fact, somewhere there's a video – of all of us… hanging out at the park. It was springtime, 2007, and we were literally playing in a field together. How much more innocent can you get? In many ways, it was the last uncomplicated season for us as friends."

A few months later, the impact of the record became clear. "We were headed to a play a show at The Underworld in Camden and we were all looking out the window of the car we were in, and I saw the word "RIOT!" spray painted on the side of one of buildings, ways away from the venue," Williams continued. She called *Riot!* "a lightning in a bottle sort of moment in time."

"I knew it was for us because it was done in the same sort of scribble, almost exactly like what was on the album cover. That moment, I said out loud, 'People get it! This is the best sign we could ever have… that other people are making it their own.'"

An electric shock of towering guitars and sugar rush payoffs, *Riot!* still stands up today as one of the era's best records.

"They were underdogs because she was a girl, and at the time it was Fall Out Boy and Panic! At the Disco and all these boybands that were rock'," David Bendeth, who produced *Riot!* as well as co-writing some of the tracks, told *Billboard*. "She was like, 'I hope we cut through with this record', and I said, 'Don't worry. We're going to beef it up. We're going to put bigger guitars on here.' And she said, 'I like it. I want it to rock.' I felt like when I finishes the record and we listened back, that we had created this monster that was built like a British tank. It was solid. You could listen to it all the way through."

The album's lead track, *Misery Business*, a huge, elastic sing-along about a romantic rival, allegedly about Hayley's real-life relationship at the time with guitarist Josh Farro, gave the band their first bona fide anthem. The song has since been reappraised by both fans and the band themselves due to lyrics they now consider to be misogynistic: *'Once a whore, you're nothing more... There's a million other girls who do it just like you / Looking as innocent as possible to get to who / They want and what they want, it's easy if you do it right / But I refuse, I refuse I refuse.'*

In 2018, Hayley made a statement, putting her own unconscious bias under the microscope: "I'll say this: *Misery Business* is not a set of lyrics that I relate to as a 26-year old woman. I haven't related to it in a very long time. Those words were written when I was 17 … admittedly from a very narrow-minded perspective." Until recently, the band removed the song from their live sets. It is worth noting that Panic! At The Disco's break through track, *I Write Sins Not Tragedies*, which includes the line: *'What a shame, the poor groom's bride is a whore'* has never suffered the same level of scrutiny as that *Misery Business* has.

The album sold 42,000 copies in the US in its first week. By a year later, it had sold 700,000 copies and earned the band their first Grammy nomination, for Best New Artist (they lost out to Amy Winehouse). That year, the band made their first UK live appearance at the Give It A Name festival.

"There were so many firsts for us with Riot!," Hayley recalled to *Time*. "It was stressful and hectic and exciting all at once."

The album's success introduced Paramore to an audience of millions, and cemented Hayley as a trailblazer in a scene that was inherently misogynistic by design. ➤

LEFT: CHRISTOPHER POLK/PENSKE MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES

MICHAEL LOCCISANO/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

Left: Paramore play for US troops in Kuwait in 2010. **Below:** Hayley Williams with Rihanna. **Right:** Backstage at the Hammersmith Apollo in 2008.

BELOW: SCOTT GRIES/GETTY IMAGES

RIGHT: NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

GUSTAVO FERRARI/GETTY IMAGES

"I hope no young female experiences the shit that I experienced," Hayley told the *NME in* 2023. "When we were teenagers, the way forward was to be tough all the time. Our entire scene was contributing to shitty treatment of women and anything that wasn't masculine. We were out on Warped Tour, this little Fueled by Ramen band acting like a hardcore band on stage. It was like if I didn't spit further, I felt like someone was going to throw me out."

Many of emo's most soaring anthems touched on broken hearts, bitter breakups and unrequited romance. As a result, the scene's sizeable female fandom found themselves screaming along to lyrics by male bands, from Fall Out Boy, to The Used and Taking Back Sunday, that painted women as the villain. The press too, gave Hayley a rough ride. In 2005, *Kerrang!* came under fire from the band for publishing an interview with the band that marked Hayley out as dictatorial and shallow. In a scathing LiveJournal entry, the band clapped back. "Sorry if it offends anyone at *Kerrang!*, but I don't think there was one bit of truth in that article."

In stark contrast, the buoyant second track of *Riot!*, *That's What You Get*, opens with the lyric: *'No sir / Well I don't wanna be the blame, not anymore / It's your turn / So take a seat, we're settling the final score.'* Suddenly female emo fans had a figurehead, their own age, one who could hold herself amid a sea of men, who they could relate to. As Refinery29 writer, Alexandra Koster, wrote in her 2023 essay, *Why Paramore Is More Relevant Than Ever*, "As girls, we finally started feeling seen. We finally felt like we belonged in the mosh pit. We felt like we were listening to music that was made for us."

Following the release of their third album, 2009's *Brand New Eyes*, Paramore had taken emo's relationship with the mainstream to new heights – their single *Decode* appeared on the *Twilight* soundtrack, while the track *The Only Exception* had featured in *Glee*. Yet, relationships had started to fracture within the band. Williams had been signed to Atlantic Records aged 14, but never had much interest in being a solo artist. Instead, after forming Paramore, she had fought the label to sign them as a band.

"There was a heated conversation with a team of people [at Atlantic] in which I said I would be just as happy to play these songs in Taylor's basement for the rest of my life',' she recalled to Vulture in 2020. "It was a very empowered moment. My voice was shaking. I was crying."

The band were eventually signed by Fall Out Boy's label, Fueled By Ramen. Yet, despite

“THERE WERE SO MANY FIRSTS FOR US WITH *RIOT!*. IT WAS STRESSFUL AND HECTIC AND EXCITING ALL AT ONCE.”

HAYLEY WILLIAMS

efforts from Hayley to share the spotlight with her bandmates in interviews, even wearing a T-shirt onstage with the slogan ‘PARAMORE IS A BAND’, the inference that Paramore was merely a Hayley solo project was something they struggled to shake off, and came to a head in the years to follow.

In 2010, to the shock of their remaining bandmates, the Farro brothers quit the band, claiming to be “hired guns” and calling Paramore a “manufactured product of a major label, riding on the coattails of ‘Hayley’s dream.’” Since then, Paramore has been a messy revolving door of members – each of their first three albums was created by a different lineup, a trend that would continue until 2017’s *After Laughter*.

Much like their peers, by the late noughties, Paramore had started shifting away from emo. Their 2013 eponymous album replaced fiery pop for slick pop rock, taking their career to new heights. But they remain one of the most important bands of the noughties emo boom, offering fans a uniquely different perspective on feminine angst at a time when being a woman in alternative scenes was both difficult and complex. Today, they’re more relevant than ever.

“To grow up in this scene was not a simple thing,’ Williams wrote in an open letter, published in 2022 ahead of Paramore’s headline performance at to emo revival festival When We Were Young. “To be celebrating it (and to be celebrated by it) is not a simple thing. Nothing about this life – for you, me, or anyone – is simple… What I did know was that for every ‘Take off your top!’ or snarky punkzine review… For every dramatic headline pinned on my name, or any season of self-doubt… No one was going to define Paramore but Paramore”.

PARAMORE

ALL WE KNOW IS FAILING 2005
RIOT! 2007
BRAND NEW EYES 2009

They may have been late to the 2000s emo party, but Hayley Williams' outfit became one of its most iconic bands.

WORDS: MADDY HOWELL

When Paramore released their debut album in 2005, they were grieving. Fresh from signing a record deal and heading to Orlando, Florida to work on a full-length record, bassist Jeremy Davis announced his departure from the band. The first of three exits before he said his final goodbyes to Hayley Williams and co. in 2015, the news would come to form the basis of *All We Know Is Falling*, an album of pain, anger, and desperately searching for a way forward.

The early-2000s pop-punk boom was nearing its end by the time the Nashville, band fully emerged, musically, there's little remarkable to note about Paramore's debut venture. Almost wholly composed of mid-tempo rock songs with a steady drum-beat and simple guitar riffs, it hardly breaks new ground, but - whilst the rest of the band would come to blossom on later releases - Williams' fiery presence behind the mic is truly the star of the show here.

At a time when the number of prominent female-fronted bands in the alternative scene could be counted on one hand, the then-16-year-old vocalist projects a soaring confidence. Spitting the line, *'We held the world out in our hands / and you ran away,'* on the album's scathing opening track, the bitterness here is considered, and in a scene plastered with melodrama - the emotion feels entirely warranted. From the heartfelt pleas of *Conspiracy* - the first song Williams and guitarist Josh Farro ever wrote together - to the bittersweet urgency of *Emergency* - a track exploring the singer's perception of her parent's failing marriage - it's an astonishingly mature release.

Capturing the confusion and anguish of teenagehood, whether it's the homesick laments of *Franklin* or the lovesick grieving of soaring cut *Never Let This Go*, it's easy to believe every word that comes out of Williams' mouth. Offering up glimmers of Paramore's potential, their dynamic songwriting duo already established, Williams and Farro constructed the foundation of something truly special on *All We Know Is Falling*. Their vocals intertwined on the gut-punch of powerful closer *My Heart* - Farro's screams colliding with Williams' delicate melodies - the pieces of their puzzle began to slot into place, but it was in 2007 that the bigger picture became clear.

Building upon the sturdy beginnings of their

ALL WE KNOW IS FAILING

Released: July 2005
Personnel: Hayley Williams (vocals), Josh Farro (guitar), Jason Bynum (guitar), Lucio Rubino/Jeremy Davis (bass), Zac Farro (drums)
Peak chart position: No.51 (UK)
Tracklisting:
All We Know
Pressure
Emergency
Brighter
Here We Go Again
Never Let This Go
Whoa
Conspiracy
Franklin
My Heart

NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS/GETTY

Hayley Williams onstage in 2010. **Below right:** Paramore in 2006.

LYLE A. WAISMAN/GETTY IMAGES

RIGHT: AARON RAPOPORT/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

RIOT!

Released: June 2007
Personnel: Hayley Williams (vocals), Josh Farro (guitar), Jeremy Davis (bass), Zac Farro (drums)
Peak chart position:
Tracklisting: No.24 (UK), No.15 (US)
For A Pessimist, I'm Pretty Optimistic
That's What You Get
Hallelujah
Misery Business
When It Rains
Let The Flames Begin
Miracle
Crushcrushcrush
We Are Broken
Fences
Born For This

debut, Paramore's second album is pure adrenaline. Named *Riot!* as a tribute to the chaotic onslaught of ideas brought to the writing process by the band, it's delightfully messy in parts, yet brilliantly refined. Opening on the bright anthemics of instant earworm *For A Pessimist, I'm Pretty Optimistic*, everything here is dialled up to the max – the melodrama, the angst, and, most importantly, the confidence.

A crashing single drumbeat sparking *That's What You Get* into life, each note is purposeful. Distinctly more focused, every singalong feels primed to be echoed through arenas, and each lyric is destined for AIM away messages and MySpace bios. Tackling the woes of growing up and learning the hard truths of the world on *We Are Broken* and redefining your own self-worth on *Miracle*, for every angry outburst, *Riot!* offers a chaser of growth and empowerment, but Williams would be the first to admit that she didn't have it all figured out.

In a scene underlined by its boy's club mentality, Paramore's anti-girl anthem *Misery Business* went down a treat. Palm-muted power chords ripping out as Williams criticises an ex's new partner for 'stealing' him away, it savagely pits two teenage girls against one another before dropping the brutal line: *'Once a whore, you're nothing more.'* Its misogyny did little to encourage a more inclusive scene, but it's impossible to deny the brilliance of sweet, sweet revenge (the song was retired from Paramore's live set in 2018 , before being was reinstated in 2022).

The band's crossover success cemented as thousands of teenage girls aggressively screamed the hit's chorus refrain into hairbrushes across the globe, in a culture ravaged by sexism – where female musicians were often hypersexualised and commodified – there's something powerful in Williams' reclamation. Triumphantly declaring, *'This is how we'll dance / When they try to take us down'* over the pounding drums of *Let The Flames Begin* later in the record, a sense of unity is forged, encouraging the emo scene to think beyond their own emotions and look toward community.

It might seem an overdramatic claim, but in a scene filled with lonely kids searching for confirmation that someone else felt the same way there's a revolutionary feeling to *Riot!*. The first time that many misfit girls had heard someone like them behind a microphone, singing about finding and losing love, growing up, and the struggles of fitting in, Paramore's refusal to conform brought a cultural reset to emo. With the album's rousing closer, *Born For This*, seeing Williams announce, *'We want the airwaves back!'*, it was here that Paramore fully arrived, and oh boy was the scene ready for them.

Despite embodying the sound of a band growing up, by the late 2000s Paramore weren't necessarily growing together. With internal issues seeing them cancel shows and rumours of a break-up bubbling, 2009's *Brand New Eyes* is a bitter, brash record documenting the realities of childhood friends growing up in the public eye.

Williams and Josh Farro maintaining a relationship on the down-low during the band's first two albums, the fallout made for some of the most biting breakup songs. With several songs aimed not only at her ex but at his brother, drummer Zac Farro,, the duo departed the band the following year, but not before they were given a swift reality check from their bandmate. Dancing in the flames of their blazing feuds, *Playing God* sees Williams criticise the siblings' sanctimonious behaviour

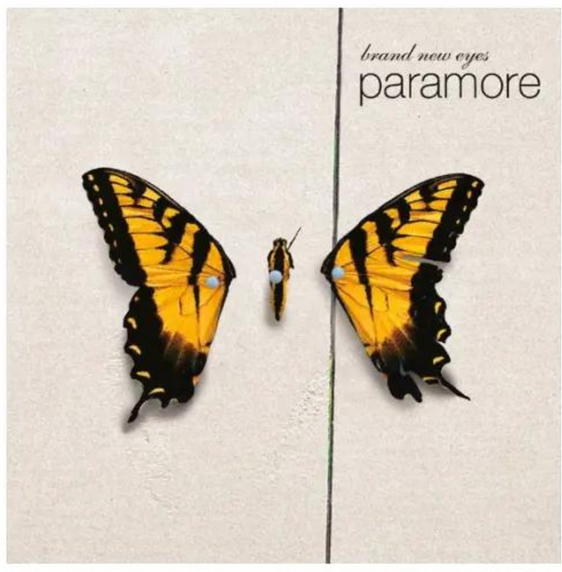
BRAND NEW EYES

Released: September 2009
Personnel: Hayley Williams (vocals), Josh Farro (guitar), Taylor York (guitar), Jeremy Davis (bass), Zac Farro (drums)
Peak chart position: No.1 (UK), No.2 (US)
Tracklisting:
Careful
Ignorance
Playing God
Brick By Boring Brick
Turn It Off
The Only Exception
Feeling Sorry
Looking Up
Where The Lines Overlap
Misguided Ghosts
All I Wanted

over the guitarist's own melodies, whilst the explosive *Careful* sees the vocalist outline the importance of finding your own place in the world – later sparking accusations of 'ungodliness' from Farro.

If anything Paramore had released prior was vengeful, *Brand New Eyes* was plain nasty. Its lyrics wickedly raw, *Feeling Sorry* and *Ignorance* are the type of songs that every spiteful teenager reeling from a breakup wishes they could pen for their ex. Less forgive and forget and more resent and remind, whether she's targeting the changes in her relationship with religion or with her bandmates, Williams is entirely unapologetic.

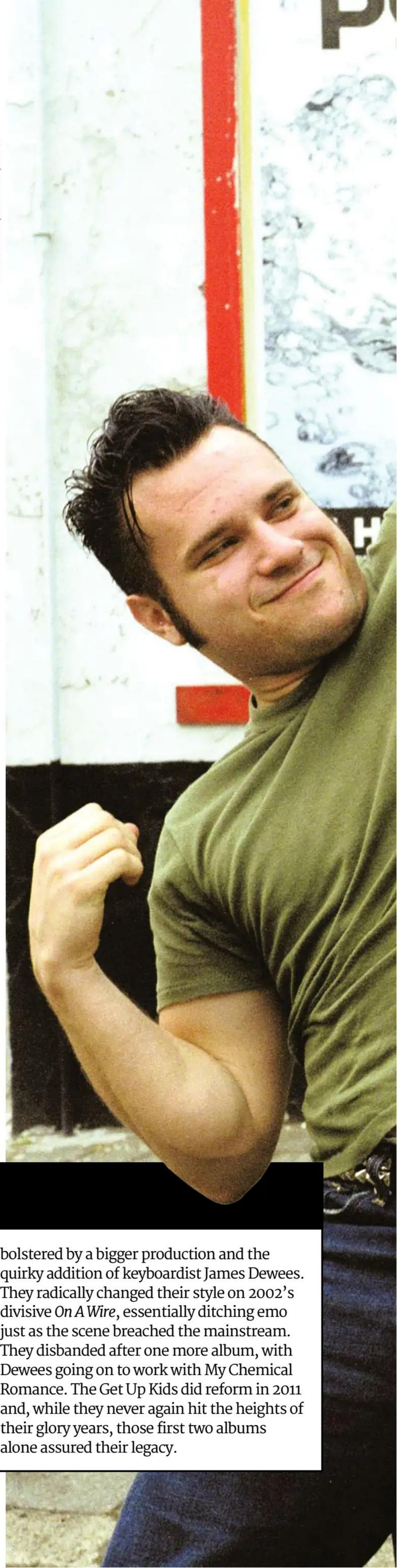
Laden with melancholic hooks and pop melodies, what these songs lack in subtlety they make up for in their sincerity. From the



bolshy energy of *Looking Up* – exploring how the band's refusal to quit has led to them living out their dreams – to the infectious opening guitar melodies of *Where The Lines Overlap*, underscoring a thank you to the fans that have got them there, whilst Paramore were hashing out their differences on *Brand New Eyes* – they were united in their gratitude. Although the album's lower tempo moments add little to the mix (take ballad *The Only Exception* for instance), it's a reminder that emo doesn't have to be moping and miserable. Bright, bold, and brave, on their third album Paramore dissolved the influence of the genre into a pool of punchy pop hooks and polished production, leading a revolution that would take them to the world's biggest stages.

"*RIOT!* OFFERS GROWTH AND EMPOWERMENT, BUT WILLIAMS WOULD BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT SHE DIDN'T HAVE IT FIGURED OUT."

The In Crowd



PETER PAKVIS/REDFERNS/GETTY

My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy and Panic! At The Disco ruled the 2000s, but they weren't the only emo bands to make their mark.

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

THE GET UP KIDS

THE GET UP Kids were a hugely influential band when they emerged in the mid 90s, hitting that sweet spot and blurring the lines between emo and pop-punk in a way that would become familiar in the decade to come. "There should be a 'How to Be a Pop-Punk Kid' Starter Kit with bands like the Get Up Kids, so kids would know whose shoulders bands like us are standing on," Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz told *Alternative Press* in 2005. "Fall Out Boy would not be a band if it were not for the Get Up Kids."

Legendary status did not seem to be on the cards when The Get Up Kids formed in high school in Kansas City in 1995. They recorded their debut album, 1997's *Four Minute Mile*, for the princely sum of $4,000 and it drew enough interest to put them on the road and convince them to put their education on hold. It was 1999 follow-up *Something To Write Home About* that really blew up though, bolstered by a bigger production and the quirky addition of keyboardist James Dewees. They radically changed their style on 2002's divisive *On A Wire*, essentially ditching emo just as the scene breached the mainstream. They disbanded after one more album, with Dewees going on to work with My Chemical Romance. The Get Up Kids did reform in 2011 and, while they never again hit the heights of their glory years, those first two albums alone assured their legacy.

"FALL OUT BOY WOULD NOT BE A BAND IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE GET UP KIDS."

PETE WENTZ

THURSDAY

EMERGING FROM THE underground basement show scene of their native New Jersey in the late 90s, Thursday bypassed the Midwest emo sound that had developed during that decade and dug right back to the more aggressive emo-core roots of Embrace and Rites Of Spring, stirring in a dash of bleak poetry and a sense of dynamism that was entirely their own.

Their 1999 debut *Waiting* was very much a work in progress but they hit both creative and commercial paydirt with 2001's *Full Collapse*. They certainly weren't the first band to discover the power of a quiet-loud dynamic but few before had used it to such devastating effect. With frontman Geoff Rickly's extraordinary scream-to-a-sigh delivery at the forefront, they dragged a burgeoning screamo movement blinking into the mainstream spotlight.

"It was always about [*Full Collapse* single] *Cross Out The Eyes*," My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way told *Vice*. "If people want to talk about 'emo', that is the song. That is emotional hardcore. They were playing that video on MTV when they weren't playing anybody else. It was fucking nu-metal and *Cross Out The Eyes*."

The success of *Full Collapse* triggered a major label feeding frenzy. Thursday themselves were signed to Island Records, who helped 2003's *War All The Time* crashing into the US Top 10. There were more records, not to mention plenty of internal strife, to come, but those early 2000s albums remain the band's defining ones.

"IF PEOPLE WANT TO TALK ABOUT 'EMO', THURSDAY'S *CROSS OUT THE EYES* IS THE SONG."

GERARD WAY

ERIK SNYDER/PRESS

RIVAL SCHOOLS

FEW UNDERGROUND ARTISTS have been as universally feted as Walter Schreifels. As a member of Youth Of Today, Gorilla Biscuits and Quicksand he both helped define and reinvent what hardcore could be.

Rival Schools was originally envisaged as a revolving door collective and their first EP, 2001's *Rival Schools United By Onelinedrawing*, featured former Far frontman Jonah Matranga. They soon coalesced into a stable supergroup of sorts fronted by Schreifels, releasing highly regarded full-length debut *United By Fate* later the same year. It may have lifted its named from the fighting game *Rival Schools: United by Fate* but the album was less pugilistic than Schreifels' previous output, taking its cues from the emo zeitgeist with earnest tones of love and loss and a more melodic rasp. They managed just that one album before disbanding for the first time, but it remains an all-time classic and they did return for a second run a decade later.

THRICE

ANYONE CLAIMING THAT early '00s emo was staid or formulaic should be made to listen to Thrice on a perpetual loop. From the start they forged a dizzying combination of sounds, throwing together melodic hardcore dynamics, metallic riffs, call-and-response skate-punk hooks and complex white-knuckle time changes.

Their first two albums set the scene but it was 2003's major label debut *The Artist In The Ambulance* that really ignited, with a sublime mix of accessible emo passion, blazing technical chops and poetically cerebral songs inspired by relationships, mythology and C.S. Lewis' treatise *The Abolition Of Man*. And then, just when it seemed they'd defined their own niche, they completely reinvented themselves with the wonderfully different experimentation of 2005's *Vheissu*. There were more progressive and genre-bending curveballs to come but they have circled back to hard-hitting post-hardcore since returning from hiatus a decade ago.

PRESS X2

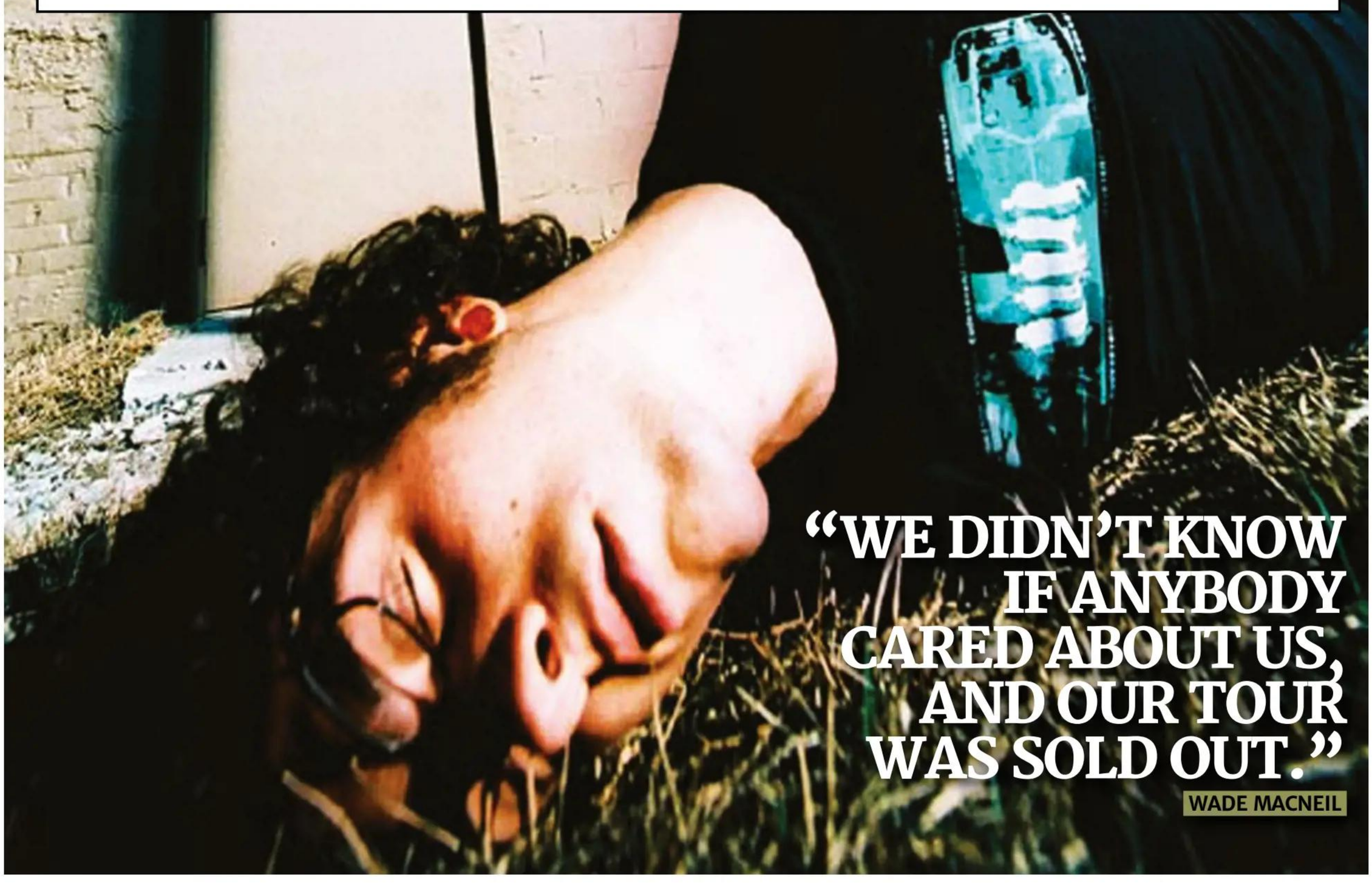
ALEXISONFIRE

ALEXISONFIRE MEMORABLY DESCRIBED themselves as "the sound of two Catholic high-school girls in mid-knife-fight" – an image that also informed the cover artwork of their self-titled 2002 debut album. Most of the band were not too long out of school themselves at that point (guitarist/vocalist Wade MacNeil was still a student) and they'd taken their name from a lactating contortionist porn star, who subsequently threatened to sue them.

With a chaotic approach to their music and the whole process of being in a band, they hardly seemed primed to become one of Canada's biggest acts. Within a couple of years they were turning up at the prestigious MMVAs red carpet in an ambulance and all four albums recorded in their first decade-long stint would eventually go Platinum in their home country.

At the same time, they were focused on expanding their horizons. "We went there not knowing if our record was out, if anybody cared about us, and we got there and our tour was sold out," MacNeil told *Exclaim!* of Alexisonfire's first UK tour in 2004. Constant touring helped spread the word and by the time they released third album *Crisis* in 2006, they were global stars.

The strength of 2009's *Old Crows/Young Cardinals* and the fact that they had a musical remit that went far beyond emo suggested they could weather the scene's demise but internal tensions and the success of Dallas Green's City And Colour project led to the band dissolving in acrimonious circumstances in 2012, before inevitably returning a few years later.



"WE DIDN'T KNOW IF ANYBODY CARED ABOUT US, AND OUR TOUR WAS SOLD OUT."

WADE MACNEIL

TAKING BACK SUNDAY

WHILE MANY OF the bands swept up in the 2000s emo goldrush got to take a one or two album run-up before jumping in, Taking Back Sunday plunged straight in at the deep end. Their 2002 debut album *Tell All Your Friends* caught the growing wave, propelled by glorious melodies, a smattering of grit and that emo requisite – a notebook full of relatable heartbreak filtered through acerbic wit.

The band had to deal with line-up changes and in-fighting, but their success continued through follow-up *Where You Want To Be*, major label debut *Louder Now* and some way beyond. Their popularity did eventually dip but, unlike the majority of their peers, they never split up or went on a lengthy hiatus – an impressive feat for a band with such a volatile streak.

PRESS X3

COHEED AND CAMBRIA

EVEN IN AS BROAD a musical church as 2000s emo, some bands seemed an odder fit than others. Nyack, New York's Coheed And Cambria had a musical reach that transcended genres but it was their very outsider status that saw them sliding in. "There were no scenes that I wanted to be excluded from because I felt like Coheed could find a way into all of the worlds," frontman Claudio Sanchez told *Alternative Press*. They certainly provided something new to the scene, with their prog-metal and post-hardcore concept albums following an overarching narrative based on their own self-penned sci-fi storyline, The Amory Wars. They poured very real emotion and human considerations into their ongoing epic however and it's difficult to deny that lines such as *'Point your gun in another direction / Now that you've cried yourself to sleep'* have a very emo appeal.

“WE’VE BEEN AN EMO BAND FOR THE LAST 23 YEARS. WE NEVER STOPPED.”

BERT MCCRACKEN

THE USED

“IT’S COOL THAT a lot of people are getting their bands back together, making new records, or re-recording old ones,” The Used’s livewire frontman Bert McCracken said in 2023. “But we’ve been an emo band for the last 23 years. We never stopped.” And while they might not have always embraced the emo tag itself, the Utah four-piece – and particularly vocalist and chief songwriter McCracken – have been laying their pain out for all the world to see since they first formed at the turn of the century.

Prior to joining The Used, the singer had rebelled against his parents and their Mormon religion. He had experienced a period of homelessness and was on the way to developing serious substance misuse problems (leading to him being kicked out of the straight edge band he was in). All this was channelled into The Used’s self-titled debut album, released in 2002, and this mixture of vulnerability and pure screaming abrasion resonated with a new, disaffected but increasingly self-aware generation.

The album blew up and eventually reached Platinum status. That was a huge feat for such a raw and uncompromising band, but they always seemed to teeter on the verge of disaster and self-destruction. By the time 2004’s *In Love And Death* rolled around, McCracken was processing the death of two close friends including his ex-girlfriend who had been pregnant with his child. The music provided his outlet, just as it would continue to do throughout a career marked by searing emotional honesty.

LEFT: CHELSEA LAUREN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

BENNETT RAGLIN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

THE RED JUMPSUIT APPARATUS

THE RED JUMPSUIT Apparatus might just have been the biggest one-hit wonders of the emo era. In 2006 the Floridians' debut single, *Face Down*, was everywhere, propelling the band to at least a temporary stardom. The song fizzed with pop-punk energy but had a serious intent, addressing the subject of domestic abuse with the biting refrain: *'Do you feel like a man when you push her around? Do you feel better now, as she falls to the ground?'*

Naturally, the band's debut album *Don't You Fake It* benefitted, hitting No.25 in the US Billboard 200 and eventual Platinum status. The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus wouldn't repeat that success, with subsequent records reaching more moderate levels of success, but at least they shone brightly during their moment in the spotlight.

FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND

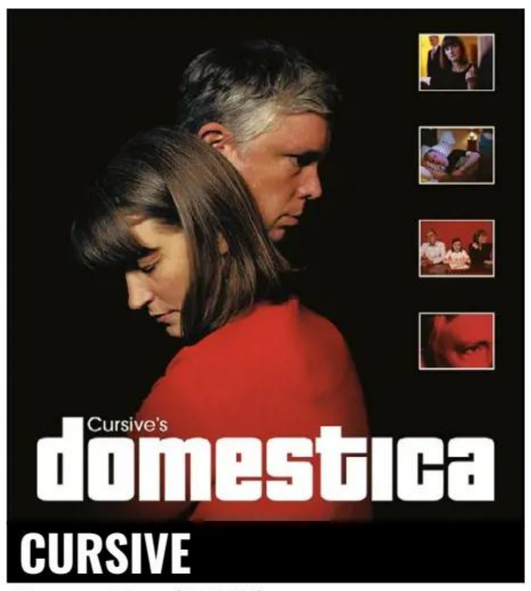
THE EMO REVOLUTION was dominated by American bands. Funeral For A Friend put in an excellent effort for Wales but fully admit to benefiting from the Stateside movement. "This was very specific, the whole post-Jimmy Eat World wave of things into My Chemical Romance, Thursday, all those bands that we loved," vocalist Matt Davies-Kreye said. Their 2003 debut album *Casually Dressed And Deep In Conversation* caught the emo zeitgeist, hitting the UK Top 20 and leading to tours with everyone from My Chemical Romance to Iron Maiden. FFAF never quite captured that kind of lightning in a bottle again, though they did release a string of creditable albums before calling it a day in 2016. Like so many others, they returned a few years later, proving you can't keep a good emo band down.

PRESS

ESSENTIAL 2000S EMO ALBUMS

There's more to 2000s emo than MCR, Fall Out Boy and Paramore.

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE



CURSIVE

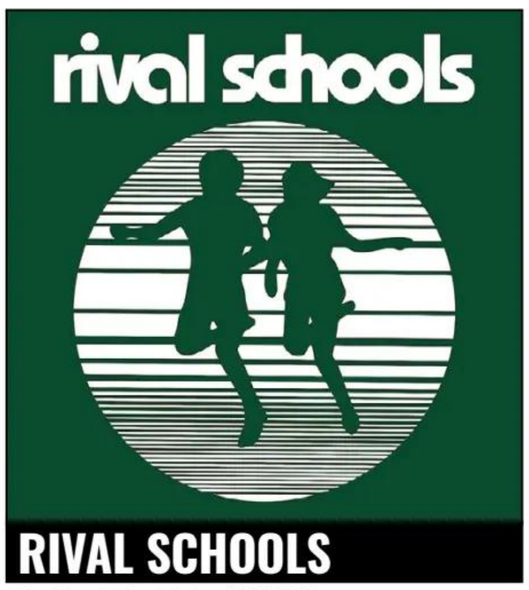
Domestica (2000)

Whether with Cursive, The Good Life or solo, Tim Kasher has always taken a warts and all approach to songwriting, imbuing his personal experiences and neuroses into his narrative lyricism. *Domestica* bridged the gap between emo and indie rock, its off-kilter rhythms and bursts of awkward noise reinventing the genre as much as the semi-conceptual nature of the narrative refreshed it. Brash but self-deprecating, it added a dimension of intelligent thought to the love-gone-wrong songs that emo was soon to become.

NEW END ORIGINAL

Thriller (2001)

It takes some cheek to call your album *Thriller*, but the group led by Far's Jonah Matranga and featuring members of Texas Is The Reason had the chops to back it up. With heart-on-sleeve sentiment and intricate melodies they set a fresh benchmark for the genre's next phase. There's a rare sense of authenticity and vulnerability to songs that switch from honey-dipped pop bangers (*14-41*) to stripped back ballads (*#1 Defender*). Though it failed to make stars of its creators, *Thriller* burned brightly to become a beloved cult classic.



RIVAL SCHOOLS

United By Fate (2001)

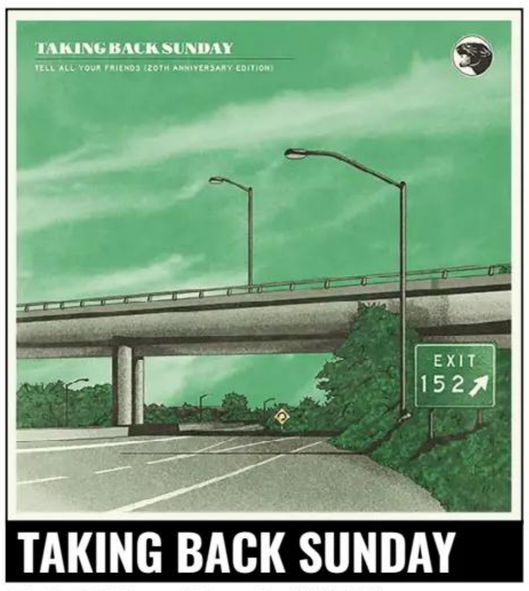
Featuring alumni from Quicksand, CIV and Youth Of Today, Rival Schools threw polished post-hardcore ingredients into to the emo melting pot. *United By Fate*'s melodic sensibilities and robust riffs showcased a sophistication and prowess that felt lacking in many of the other hopefuls. Better yet, its impact and influence extended beyond emo's reach, bringing more eyes and ears to the songwriting talents of singer/guitarist Walter Schreifels, thanks to the singles *Used For Glue* and *Good Things* gaining traction on MTV.

THURSDAY

Full Collapse (2001)

Thursday's *Full Collapse* epitomised the word 'intensity,' thanks largely to frontman Geoff Rickly's impassioned caterwauling, often delivering his lines as if on the verge of actual tears at times. Backed by music that could be both aggressive and delicate, *Full Collapse* felt like the logical conclusion to a post-hardcore basement scene coming up for air and embracing a much bigger platform to play on. The band's power and poignancy left a lasting impact, solidifying Thursday's place as a pivotal force in the annals of emo history.

Cursive: reinventing the emo genre.



TAKING BACK SUNDAY

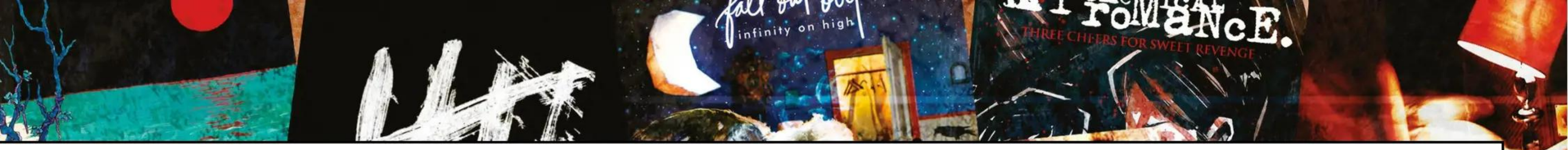
Tell All Your Friends (2002)

Without Taking Back Sunday's keenly balanced lyrical angst and energetic hooks, the following years would have looked and sounded a lot different. With its call-and-response vocals and sky-scraping riffs, *Tell All Your Friends* resonated with listeners and peers alike. Though others tried to cop their mic-swinging swagger and style, the Long Islanders stood apart, and on this first full flush of youthful exuberance ,they represented everything that people ultimately loved (or hated) about emo.

THE USED

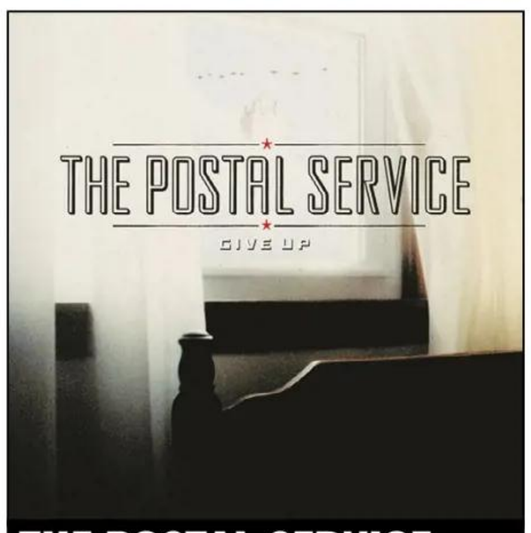
The Used (2002)

The Used barrelled into the spotlight as one of the emo scene's brightest new stars. Combining the force of personality of frontman Bert McCracken with production whiz John Feldmann, the Utah quartet delivered one of the decade's most compelling releases with their self-titled debut. Propelled by the springy, insistent bounce of lead single *The Taste Of Ink*, its raw, visceral energy was a testament to the transformative marriage of emotional honesty and rock music.



Motion Picture Soundtrack: humorous and self-conscious.

PRESS X2



THE POSTAL SERVICE

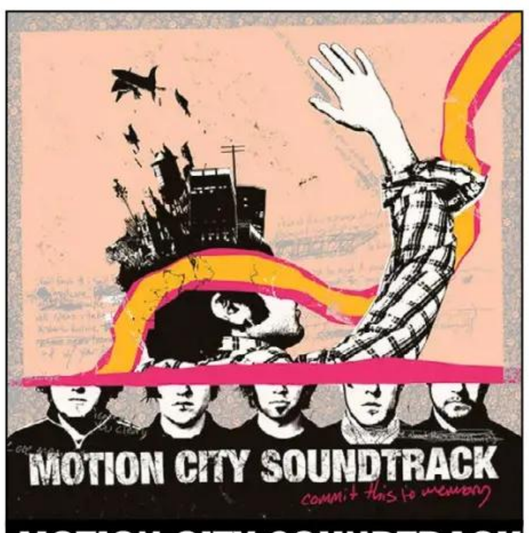
Give Up (2003)

Sub Pop's second biggest selling album ever (behind Nirvana's *Bleach*), *Give Up* introduced a unique twist to the emo template. The Postal Service was a collaboration between Death Cab For Cutie's Ben Gibbard and electronic musician Jimmy Tamborello, fusing sublime synth-pop with introspective lyrics. Its lush, atmospheric soundscapes crossed the divide between emo, indie and electronic music, proving that the scene could transcend traditional boundaries and resonate in all-new musical contexts.

THRICE

The Artist In The Ambulance (2003)

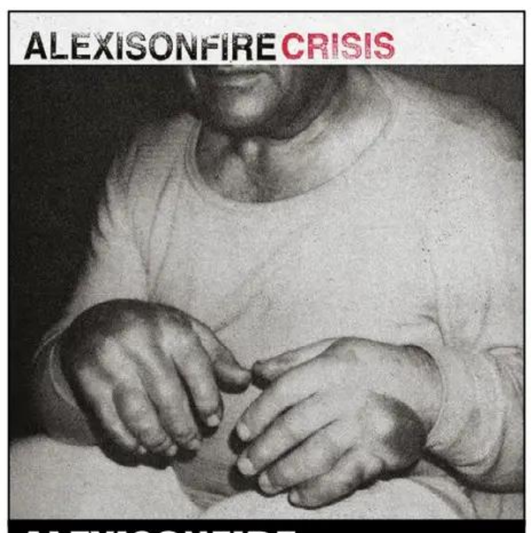
Given how much the SoCal crew have matured over the course of their career, their early albums hold up well. The fact that they enlisted , a host of scene luminaries to re-record *The Arist In The Ambulance* to celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2023 says it all. These are songs that showcase a firm grasp of restraint, power and pop instincts from a band almost impossible to pin down as strictly one thing or another. Such is the scope of what emo had become by 2003, that felt as good a sweet spot as any.



MOTION CITY SOUNDTRACK

Commit This To Memory (2005)

Like a lot of bands who followed in the footsteps of Weezer, Motion City Soundtrack took inspiration from the perceived fuck ups and failures of their own enigmatic leader, Justin Pierre. Although lumped in with the Warped Tour set at the time, the Minnesotans offered more humorous, self-conscious songs to set them apart from the pack. They would make more musically rounded records later in their career, but on their breakthrough second album, the spirit of emo shone strong and bright.



ALEXISONFIRE

Crisis (2006)

Canada's Alexisonfire had already released a couple of solid albums earlier in the decade, but there was little to suggest they had the range, power and maturity of *Crisis* up their sleeves. The band's dual vocal attack – combining Dallas Green's rousing power with George Pettit's gnarled roar – was at its most potent here, and *Crisis*'s emotionally frayed sensibilities and Alexisonfire's blend of aggression and melody made it a crucial release in highlighting emo's stylistic breadth and depth.

CHAPTER 3

THE 2010s AND BEYOND: EMO TODAY

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

The emo scene at the start of the 2010s was in a very different place compared to where it was half a decade earlier. Its original big beasts were either on hiatus (Fall Out Boy), metamorphosed into something different (Panic! At The Disco), or were on the verge of splitting (My Chemical Romance, who disbanded in 2013, albeit temporarily).

But emo was too tough to die, and as the decade progressed a new generation picked up the baton and ran with it. While many of these bands and artists were not emo in sound, they definitely were in spirit. Genre-blenders Twenty One Pilots and The 1975, SoundCloud rappers Lil Peep and Juice WRLD, and even latter-day pop titans Billie Eilish and Olivia Rodrigo all plugged into the same source, reinventing emo for a new generation, while the giants of the 2000s scene gradually came back in from the cold, led by a reunited My Chemical Romance. This is the story of the decade where emo bounced back stronger than ever.

Main photo: My Chemical Romance in 2011, two years before they split.

THE RESURRECTION OF EMO

When My Chemical Romance split in 2013, it looked like the end of emo. But the decade would throw up some huge surprises.

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

While My Chemical Romance had emerged in the early 2000s in a cloud of black-hued angst, they'd enter the following decade in a blaze of fabulous technicolour, stepping into the sunlight – and, surprisingly, not bursting into flames in the process. Their fourth album, 2010's *Danger Days: The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys*, was made by a band who had swapped the black uniforms of the mid-00s for flashy jackets and neon balaclavas. It as a record custom-made to blast out of open-top cars, ray guns at the ready. The Black Parade was well and truly dead.

On the surface, there was nothing inherently emo about *Danger Days*. This life-affirming punk rock opera is entirely at odds with the wilting sorrow of the group's previous work. At the time, My Chemical Romance were seen as genuine killjoys – not for their usual glee-crushing pessimism, but for betraying the hordes of fringed, eyeliner-adorned youths that worshipped them.

As the record's titanic first single, *Na Na Na (Na Na Na Na Na Na Na Na Na)*, proclaims, *'The future is bulletproof / The aftermath is secondary'*. It didn't matter if there was a backlash of alienated fans mourning the tonal shift – artistic integrity was paramount. My Chemical Romance were done with their days of

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Below: Fall Out Boy onstage in 2014. **Right:** Modern emo heroes Twenty One Pilots in 2019.

CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES

wallowing in their pain. While emo prided itself on authentic self-expression, the band had run into a crucial flaw of the genre: the emphasis on melancholy. Suddenly, emo as a genre wasn't a holy grail of catharsis anymore – it felt stifling.

My Chemical Romance's ascent had exposed emo's restrictive guidelines. Before 2010, if your sound and themes weren't bleak, they weren't emo – but *Danger Days* proved that it was possible to be wholeheartedly emotional even if you weren't on the brink of despair. While the backdrop is awash in colour, the content is still earnest, powerful and incredibly emotional. The album's power pop sheen never detracts from Gerard Way's heart-on-sleeve lyrical honesty – the limitations of 'emo' would have merely stifled their creative endeavours.

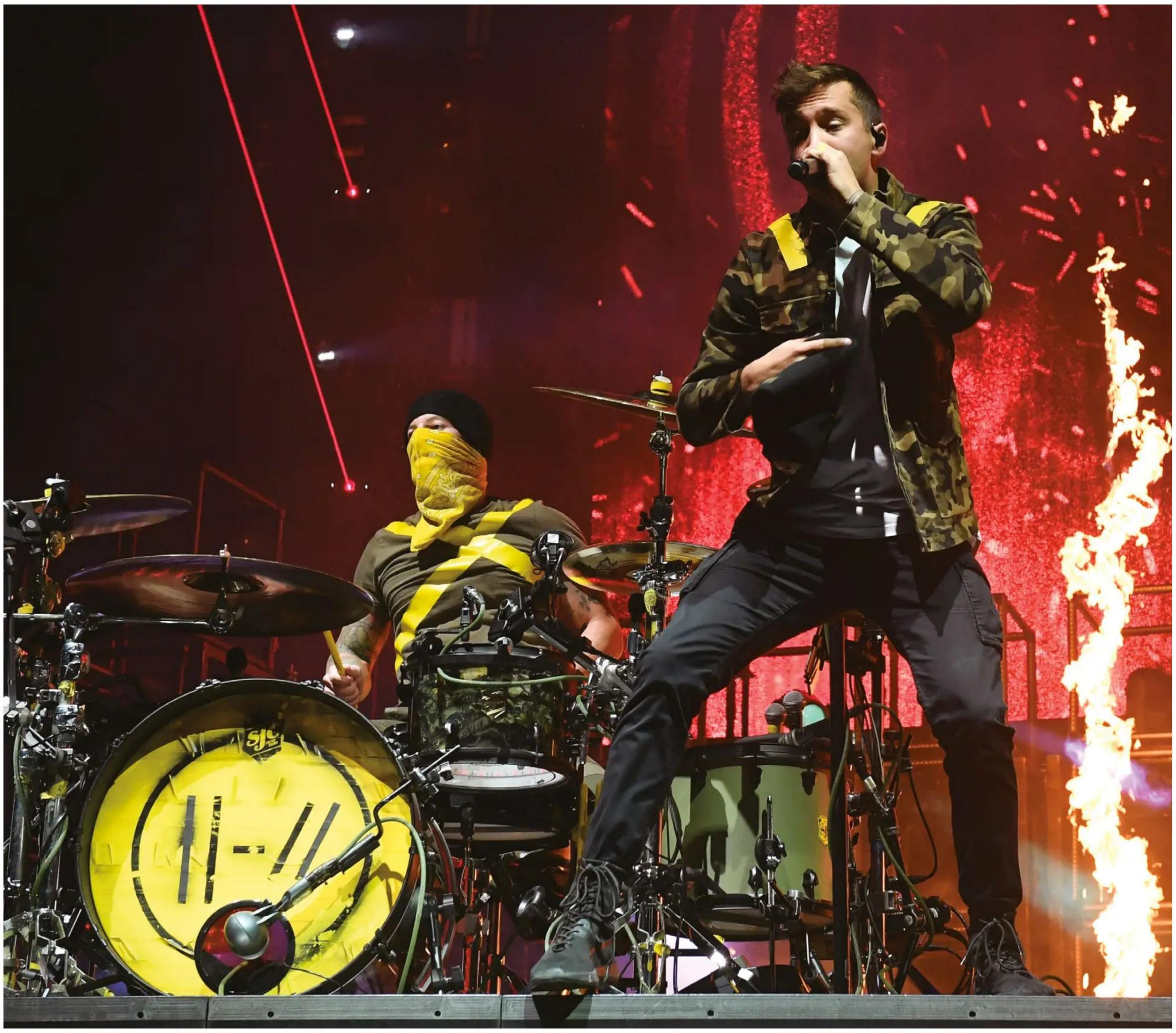
The record was a true watershed moment. For once, emo wasn't the best form of catharsis. In fact, My Chemical Romance had started to loathe the genre. In Chris Payne's 2022 book *Where Are Your Boys Tonight?: The Oral History Of Emo's Mainstream Explosion*, MCR bassist Mikey Way said the band "did everything we could, kicking and screaming" to escape the genre as it stood. And other bands would quickly follow suit.

"DESPITE NOT FITTING THE MID-'00S EMO TEMPLATE, TWENTY ONE PILOTS HARNESSED THE SAME INTENSITY AND CONFESSIONAL ETHOS."

For My Chemical Romance, the left turn of *Danger Days* wouldn't be enough, and the band split in 2013. "It wasn't fun to make stuff any more," Gerard Way told *The Guardian*. "I think breaking up the band broke us out of that machine."

MCR's demise happned to coincide with a shift within the emo scene. In 2013, Fall Out Boy returned from a four-year hiatus with the boundary-pushing *Save Rock And Roll* (featuring guest appearances from Elton John and rapper Big Sean), Panic! At The Disco flexed their synthetic pop-rock muscles on *Too Weird To Live, Too Rare To Die!*, and even Paramore were embracing a poppier, new-wave shimmer on their self-titled record.

Suddenly, emo artists had permission to be vulnerable outside of their usual sonic confines. Alt-rock breakdowns and bruised post-hardcore aggression were no longer the only way to deliver diary-entry authenticity – experimental catharsis was just as powerful.



ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

And, as bands strayed further and further from their gritty roots, emo fans also began to shift with the times. The world was ready for more experimental forms of catharsis

The shift in attitudes ushered in a new form of emo, with a duo from Columbus, Ohio leading the charge. Twenty One Pilots had carved out a big local following with their first two albums, 2009's self-titled debut and 2011's ironically titled *Regional At Best*, but they would position themselves as poster boys for emo's next wave with 2013's *Vessel*. While singer Tyler Joseph and drummer Josh Dun weren't serving up anything close to the punk-infused rush of MCR's *I'm Not Okay (I Promise)* or Paramore's *Misery Business*, they were just as impactful.

Despite not fitting the mid-00 emo template, *Vessel* harnessed the same intensity and confessional ethos. Every track seems to push the bounds of sonic capabilities, exploring new ways to immerse you in the record's themes - you can feel your brain itching as Joseph unravels cerebral suffering through flurrying rap and slick wordplay on *Migraine*, feel the poignant vulnerability hanging in the air during stripped back, piano-driven *Truce*.

Just like My Chemical Romance before them, Twenty One Pilots showed how emo as a genre could go beyond its restrictions. Catharsis didn't have a fixed sound – heart-wrenching themes could easily be explored in a daze of synths, or pulse over a reggae beat. It was a hugely successful formula, with *Vessel* and its follow-up, 2015's *Blurryface*, turning Twenty One Pilots into one of the decade's most successful bands.

Despite this changing of the guard, old school emo wasn't dead and buried. An emo revival was already underway even by the time My Chemical Romance split. New Jersey's The Front Bottoms channelled folk-punk on 2013's *Talon Of The Hawk*, Modern Baseball's *You're Gonna Miss It All* added a quirky pop punk edge over its pained musing, and The Hotelier injected a glorious crash of punk rock into *Home, Like Noplace Is There*.

Other bands put a new spin on the genre's traditional sound. Turnover showcased a brand of shoegaze-tinged emo on 2015's *Peripheral Vision*, delivering hazy-edged grunge introspection. The World Is A Beautiful Place & I Am No Longer Afraid To Die were perhaps the most impressive of the mid 2010s emo revivalists, their 2015 release *Harmlessness* basking in a sea of ambitious indie rock soundscapes. The record transformed emo into something immense, filtering it through a surreal post-rock veil, frazzled riffs whirring as basslines soar.

Yet while revivalists took solace in older emo palettes, there were more radical variations on the horizon, not least the in the shape of emo-rap. In the darkest corners of Soundcloud, rappers began to inject emo vulnerabilities into trap and rap tunes. The site would slowly build its own underground community of emos seeking ➤

Left and below: Emo-adjacent Soundcloud rappers Juice WRLD and Lil Peep.

DAVID WOLFF - PATRICK/REDFERNS/GETTY RIGHT: VICTOR BOYKO/GETTY IMAGES FOR BALMAIN

a new form of lo-fi self-expression, and the biggest success stories would come in the shape of Lil Peep and Juice Wrld.

What Soundcloud rappers lacked in production, they made up for it in emotional integrity. While Lil Peep had been forging his own brand of underground emo rap the early 2000s, 2015 would see him starting to gain traction. His 2015 mixtape, *Lil Peep; Part One*, lured in a wave of curious fans with its minimal trap beats and soporific flow. Peep's production placed his lyrics at the forefront, with every bleak couplet oozes pain as they were delivered with a blasé hopelessness. It's a release that quietly drowns in its own misery, devoid of the snarling bite one might expect from an emo anthem by with exactly the same emotional core.

The ease of uploading to Soundcloud would unleash a wave of emo rappers onto the world. Juice WRLD's first track, 2015's *Forever*, was recorded on his mobile phone – yet the raw recording captures something sharp, earnest. And, for many, Lil Peep and Juice WRLD's trap and rap focused emo was exactly what they'd been waiting for – both artists would go on to record deals, with Juice Wrld even going on to top US and Canadian charts with sophomore release, 2019's *Death Race For Love*.

Tragically, neither Lil Peep nor Juice WRLD would live to see the end of the decade. The former died in 2017, the latter in 2019, both of drug related causes and both at the age of 21.

By the end of the 2010s, emo's new generation had taken over the world, whether it was chart behemoths such as Twenty One Pilots, the explosion of soundcloud rappers, or indie artists such as Phoebe Bridgers, whose 2017 album *Stranger In The Alps* was a beautiful, emo-adjacent collection of intimate confessionals. But pure emo, in at least its most famous incarnation, seemed to be confined to a drawer marked '2000s nostalgia', with the likes of Fall Out Boy dropping 2018's electro-rock album *Mania* and Panic! At The Disco leaning into frontman Brendan Urie's love of Broadway with the high-kicking *Pray For The Wicked*.

All that changed in 2019, with the announcement that My Chemical Romance were reuniting. The timing was significant: the *Danger Days* apocalyptic storyline was set in 2019, and the date had been splashed on T-shirts and posters around the time of the album's release, which was either pure coincidence or one of the greatest moments of forward planning in the history of music.

MCR made their live return with a gig at California's Shrine

My Chemical Romance’s Gerard Way during a comeback show in Los Angeles in October 2022.

ALLEN J. SCHABEN / LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES

Exhibition Hall in December 2019. The onset of Covid meant a full comeback tour – including US arena dates and three outdoor shows in the UK – would be scrapped, but it didn’t matter – emo’s biggest band were back.

Inadvertently, the pandemic stoked an intense brand of emo nostalgia. Records served as a comfort amid the mind-numbing mundanity of a world on hold – and few were concerned with releasing new records, considering the circumstances. TikTok would also serve a key role in heightening the emo nostalgia, many taking to the platform to share their renewed obsession with heavy-hitting records from their teen years. It also served as a perfect time for yet another emo renaissance, with bands like Static Dress releasing their first EP *Prologue…* in 2021.

By 2022, with the pandemic receding, everyone was ready for My Chemical Romance’s return. When comeback single *The Foundations Of Decay* dropped, three years on from their initial reunion announcement, it was like a gift from the emo gods had been planted. It built on the foundations of what the group had left behind back in 2013 – yet it felt far sharper, a monolithic prog rock and goth-infused phenomenon.

While fans had learned to embrace the experimental realms of modern emo, My Chemical Romance’s return reminded everyone of what the world was missing. The tour was a perfect encapsulation of everything My Chemical Romance had to offer, and more. Every performance was doused in melodrama – standing in the crowd, fog emanating out from the stage, as *The Foundations Of Decay* began to blast out from the speakers, it felt like being part of something bigger than yourself. Every twist, turn, was unexpected, with a unique setlist night after night. It wasn’t just nostalgia-bait – it was a band reborn, alive and thriving. My Chemical Romance were back, and with them emo was entering yet another new chapter.

Existential angst, cryptic lyrics, theatrical grandeur and a sound that takes in everything from hip hop to reggae – Twenty One Pilots are the face of modern emo.

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

It's 2007, and Tyler Joseph is screaming in the basement of his parents' house in Columbus, Ohio. Sharp, sorrowful wails fill the room, scratching their way out under the door at the top of the stairs. Occasionally, his family will pause, momentarily acknowledging the muffled cries beneath their feet. Yet, alone, Joseph persists, not caring if he is heard, but desperate to be listened to.

Before Twenty One Pilots, Joseph was just a high school senior at odds with the world. Though he had forged some semblance of self-worth and meaning through poetry, a lingering sense of dejection persisted. He felt trapped inside of his own mind, and so, in the guts of his family home, he found a way to drag his emotions out and share them with the world. Twisting his scribbled thoughts into visceral rap tracks, Joseph recorded a solo album, *No Phun Intended*, self-releasing it online in 2008. While the production was shaky, the existential grandeur was steadfast and poignant.

The cerebral hip-hop, quirky wordplay and bruising level of honesty that were present on *No Phun Intended* would lay the foundations for Joseph's future. The bones of Twenty One Pilots were nestled within its tracks: a verse from *Drown* would eventually appear on the band's debut, finding a new home on *Fall Away*, while a portion of *Blasphemy* would be repurposed on 2011's *Regional At Best*, serving as an intense climactic final verse on the song *Anathema*.

When Joseph eventually launched Twenty One Pilots in 2009, it was initially a trio.

PRESS

"I KNOW SOME PEOPLE MIGHT NOT LIKE THIS, BUT I KIND OF VIEW *VESSEL* AS OUR FIRST RECORD."

TYLER JOSEPH

THE POWER OF TWO

Left: Twenty One Pilots' Josh Dun and Tyler Joseph live in 2015. **Below right:** Dun and Joseph pick up the Grammy for *Stressed Out* in 2017.

"*BLURRYFACE* SKYROCKETED TWENTY ONE PILOTS FROM THE INTERNET'S EMO DARLINGS TO MAINSTREAM SUCCESS STORIES."

Childhood friend Nick Thomas joined as bassist, while Chris Salih, who crossed paths with Joseph during their first year at Ohio State University, signed up as drummer. The gang soon moved into a house together, and Joseph would head down into the basement to scream and unleash his emotions. But this time he wasn't alone – he had his bandmates in tow, recording with him.

Twenty One Pilots released their self-titled debut album in 2009. Its stark, naked self-expression was almost painful to listen to, although its combination of melancholia-drenched piano, slick injections of hip-hop, and pained heart-on-sleeve confessional suggested something bigger was at work. *Addict With A Pen* in particular served as definitive proof of the group's potential, Joseph's thin, broken voice oozing pain as the track unfolds like a pseudo-suicide note.

Due to its intense nature, *Addict With A Pen* would also become one of the group's most gut-wrenching tracks to witness live. The trio had strived to lure in audiences by performing acrobatics and wearing daft costumes on-stage, but nothing connected with fans quite like the sight of a shaking Joseph fending off tears as he battled to make it to the end of a track. While their debut didn't necessarily fit the emo mould at the time, Twenty One Pilots embodied what emo was: they were raw, they were emotional and they had the power to unite fans in their sorrow.

By 2011, the band had slimmed down from a trio to a duo. Following the departure of Thomas and Salih, drummer Josh Dun would join Joseph on his musical journey, making his debut on that year's *Regional At Best*. From the chiming charms of *Slowtown* to *Kitchen Sink*'s punchy search for purpose, it lived up to its semi-ironic title and built them a strong local fanbase.

Inevitably, record labels started paying attention. The duo released third album, *Vessel*, via emo/punk mainstay Fueled By Ramen in 2013. "I know some people might not like this, but I kind of view *Vessel* as our first record", Joseph has said. It's clear why: *Vessel* amplifies the pain he unleashed in his basement into something more powerful, cleaner and expansive. It galvanised a new era of emo, processing emotional vulnerability through glistening electropop, indie rock and sleek, bouncing hip-hop.

While the duo had already amassed an army of diehard fans – known as the Clique – 2015's *Blurryface* changed everything, skyrocketing Twenty One Pilots to mainstream success. It topped the US *Billboard* charts, and the adolescence-mourning anthem *Stressed Out* bagged a Grammy in 2017. *Blurryface* also marked a shift conceptually – the record's release was teased out, with a suspicious Twitter account called @blurryface posting cryptic messages, unnervingly distorted audio and 'leaked' tracks.

Everyone would be immersed in a similar hunt when *Trench* dropped in 2018. Its roll-out was even more cryptic and detailed than its predecessor, with the enigmatic DMAORG website exposing fans to a seemingly endlessly updating world of lore. From the error codes, scanned documents and blueprints of dystopian structures, fans would soon note that *Blurryface* had been an early representation of the parasitic nature of *Trench*'s world: Dema, Joseph's symbolic city symbolising the exhausting, labyrinthine logic of depression. 2021's more indie-leaning release *Scaled And Icy* would continue to bulk out the lore, while the 2024's *Clancy* has closed off the decade-long conceptual journey.

While there's no telling where the band may head next, *Clancy* track *Backslide* seems to suggest they may step back from intricate world-building. *'I used to be a champion of a world you can't see, now I'm drowning in logistics'*, Tyler reflects in the lyrics, hinting that concepts may have restricted the creative freedom the group once allowed him.

KEVIN WINTER X2

VESSEL 2013
BLURRYFACE 2015

Twenty One Pilots walk a perplexing tightrope. Thematically, any given track could crumble in the palm of your hand; the duo capture sorrow with a profound degree of fluency, Tyler Joseph's acute lyrics perfectly unravelling the turmoil of loss, adolescent uncertainty and depression. Yet there's a contrasting air of confidence, a cocksure certainty rooted within their introspective soul-searching. They aren't just a clean-cut example of classic emo vulnerability; Twenty One Pilots lure listeners in with their assured soundscaping, before forcing them to confront anxieties head-on.

In a shimmer of vibrant electronica, buoyant indie rock and slick rap, 2013's *Vessel* embodies the duality of fragility and sonic confidence. Lyrically, their third album is sensitive and exposed – yet bold genre-flipping transforms moments of weakness into rich, powerful anthems. It oozes brightness in some of its darkest moments, boasting indie synth-pop ballad *Holding On To You*, flashy techno-tinged banger *Fake You Out* and the anthemic howl of *Guns For Hands'* desperate, keyboard smashing climax.

Blurryface channels a darker sonic tone, focusing more on alt-rock and reggae than its predecessor. One again, the confidence of Joseph and Dun transforms vulnerability into star-studded singalongs. Opening track *Heavydirtysoul* sees Joseph begging for help, yet the might of the industrial instrumentation and his sharp, precise flow result in a remarkably confident and compelling anthem. Similarly, *Stressed Out*'s anxiety is offset by its distinctive, wavering synths and strong hooks.

Of course, glimmers of absolute, raw emotion are aplenty. Joseph has mastered the art of sounding positively broken on record, with his finest performance being the jumpy, existential tirade of *Migraine* from *Vessel*. Both the latter album and *Blurryface* end by stripping away the instrumental bravado: when respective piano-driven closers *Truce* and *Goner* hit, Joseph is no longer the poised wordsmith, but a wounded young man barely keeping it together.

EMO NOW!

From The 1975's 80s-inspired indie-rock to Billie Eilish's acclaimed art-pop, the influence of emo is everywhere in the 2020s.

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

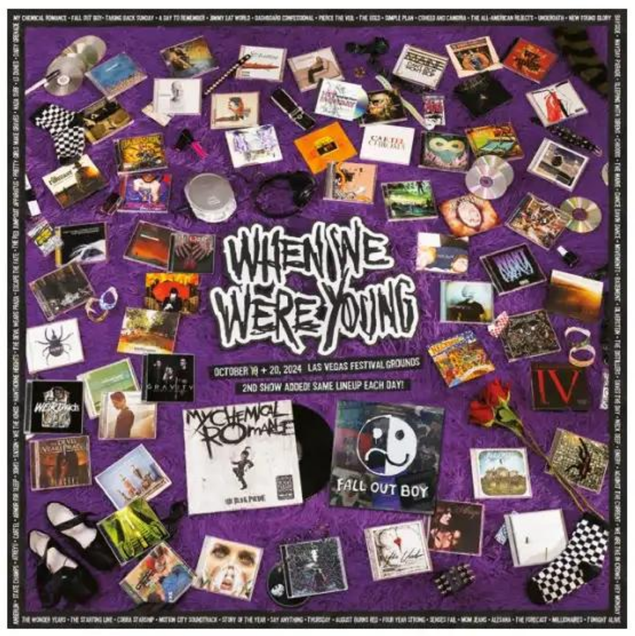
In 2022, The 1975's singer and guitarist Matty Healy sat down with Mike Kinsella, former drummer with '90s emo trailblazers Cap'n Jazz and frontman with the equally revered American Football, for a joint interview with *The Face* magazine.

Given The 1975's 80s-inspired pop-rock, it was an unlikely pairing. But Healy proved to be unexpectedly knowledgeable about the emo scene, from its inception to its current proponents. As well as namechecking 80s emo-core progenitors Rites Of Spring and Embrace, he acknowledged the debt he owed to American Football's self-titled 1999 debut album.

"I would've heard it in 2004 on Limewire," Healy said, referring to the pre-Spotify file-sharing service. "It is this kind of really, really beautiful moment that stood outside of what was considered emo-rock and stood outside of math-rock."

Healy's love of cult Midwestern emo records shouldn't come as a surprise. He was a kid in his early teens when emo broke big in the mid-2000s, and it provided the soundtrack to his formative years. The 1975 themselves started life in 2002 as an emo and pop-punk covers band, while Healy described himself in a 2019 as interview as "an active emo man, I suppose I'd call myself", referencing Mineral, Braid and Joan Of Arc. The singer would bring things full circle in December 2022 when he joined Dashboard Confessional onstage to play their 2001 song *Hands Down*.

Emo's DNA is deeply embedded in modern music, going way beyond the rock scene and into the worlds of pop, hip hop and R&B. That much became evident in the mid-2010s with the rise of rappers such as Juice WRLD and Lil Peep, who put a woozy, lo-fi spin on hip hop while delving deep into their own psyches as so many emo outfits had before. Sure, they didn't sound like My Chemical Romance or Fall Out Boy, let alone Cursive or Jawbreaker, but there was an emotional connection to those bands.



More recently, a new wave of musicians have mined emo's self-reflection and vulnerability while presenting it in a different form. Artists as diverse as indie rock superstar Phoebe Bridges, pop-punk livewire Willow Smith and genre-blending bedroom R&B star PinkPantheress and have all spoken about the impact emo has had on them.

"It's never just, 'I'm having a bad day' – it's, 'I'm gonna *dieeeee!*'" PinkPantheress told *Alternative Press*. I love it so much. The passion that they're exuding, you don't really get in pop. In emo, it was always something different."

Some of the biggest names in pop owe a clear debt to emo. Billie Eilish's hushed, introspective music and lyrics are underpinned by an emo-style mix of insecurity and defiance, while Olivia Rodrigo has talked about the influence Paramore and their singer Hayley Williams have had on her (Paramore themselves were one of the support acts on Taylor Swift's record-breaking Eras tour, another emo/pop connectin).

Of course, emo in its traditional form has returned with a vengeance. While the likes of Fall Out Boy and Panic! At The Disco have drifted away from their emo roots, the return of My Chemical Romance in 2019 sparked a resurgence of interest in the genre. A wave of young bands from Static Dress to Origami Angels are channelling the scene's original sound and ethos, while the 2024 summer festival calendar is full of events dedicated to emo, from Canada's All Your Friends Fest, featuring Fall Out Boy, Jimmy Eat World and Dashboard Confessional, to When We Were Young, which sees My Chemical Romance play *The Black Parade* in full. Trends may come and go, but emotion never goes out of fashion.

Above and left Billie Eilish and The 1975's Matt Healy are emo in its modern form.

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES INSET: JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

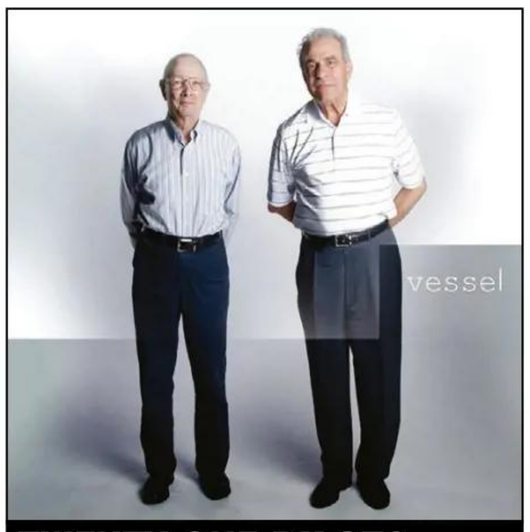
“I’M AN ACTIVE EMO MAN, I SUPPOSE I’D CALL MYSELF.”

MATTY HEALY

ESSENTIAL MODERN EMO ALBUMS

From alt-pop to soundcloud rap, this is emo in the 2010s and 2020s.

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY



TWENTY ONE PILOTS

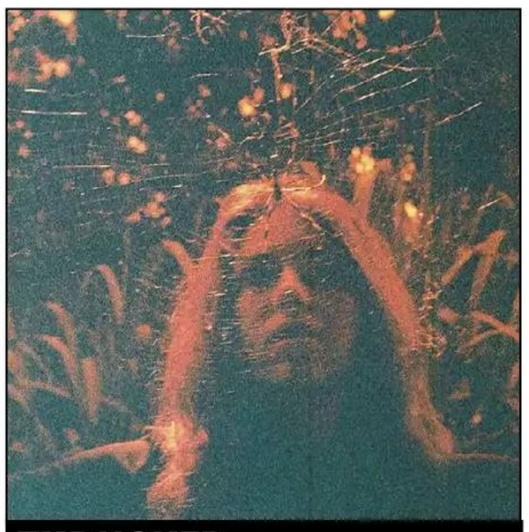
Vessel (2013)

Twenty One Pilots' third album – and major label debut – would change the course of emo history. Tyler Joseph's cerebral tongue-twisters plugged them into the world of hip hop as well as more traditional emo. *Vessel*'s diverse palette is amplified by Joseph's eloquence - there's no wonder fans clamour to etch every word into their skulls. From depression-fuelled showstopper *Migraine* to the electro-hip-hop of *Guns For Hands* to the sombre, wistful musing of *Trees*, *Vessel* totally shifted the emo zeitgeist.

MODERN BASEBALL

You're Gonna Miss It All (2014)

Modern Baseball summed up their mission statement in the lyrics of *Notes*, the opening track of their second album: *'A brickboot swimming lesson in the deep end of adolescence.'* The Philadelphia outfit's sincere Midwest emo is the sonic equivalent of a smeared confessional on the back of a bathroom stall. But why mourn the misery when you can embrace it? From the rousing punch of *Rock Bottom* to invigorating folk punk cut *Your Graduation*, *You're Gonna Miss It All* transformed vulnerability into cathartic pop punk anthems.



TURNOVER

Peripheral Vision (2015)

Turnover's soft-focus emo-grunge is both ethereal and emotional, and *Peripheral Vision* sinks into a dreamscape of shoegaze-y sonics, muting the drone of the outside world. Vocals melt into the thick of its deliciously light riffs, every track rose-tinted and ineffably romantic. Tranquility permeates the pining *Dizzy On The Comedown*, while *I Would Hate You If I Could*'s melancholic mourning of old flings is just beautiful. Glazing bitterness with something sweeter, Turnover make the emotive breakthroughs easier to stomach.

THE WORLD IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE & I AM NO LONGER AFRAID TO DIE

Harmlessness (2015)

The second album from Connecticut's TWIABP&IANLATD floats in a daze of twanging indie rock, soaring violins and post-rock riffs. Musically, it spans the folk introspection of *You Can't Live There Forever* to *We Need More Skulls*'s echo chamber of menacing, shoegaze-y gloom. Lyrically, it tackles difficult topics, yet the sepia-toned sonic beauty softens the blow . *Harmlessness* unstitches the fabric of reality, rejoicing in the tiny flickers of triumph.

LIL PEEP

Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 2 (2018)

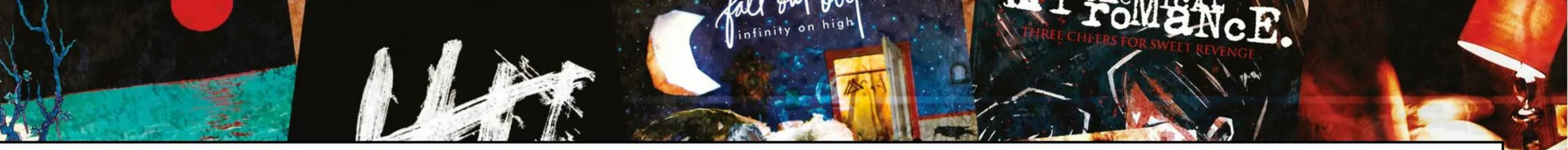
While emo rap may not be about roaring post-hardcore riffs, what it lacks in heaviness, it makes up for it in intensity. Unable to hide behind a thick wall of sound, Lil Peep laid his struggles bare, dragging his demons out into the open for the world to see. Released the year after his drug-related death, *Come Over When You're Sober, Pt. 2* packs a extra emotional punch, his exploration of substance abuse and self-destruction as vivid and heart-wrenching as any guitar band.

BILLIE EILISH

When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go? (2019)

While Billie Eilish may be the face of modern alt-pop, she wears her emo influence on her sleeve. Beneath whispered vocals and genre-blending soundscaping, a profound degree of honesty is nestled. *When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?* is as sensitive as it is dynamic. The distorted pulse of *Xanny* and the rumbling creep of *Bury A Friend* ooze gothic darkness, while *Ilomilo*'s dreamy electropop and the stripped back *Listen Before I Go* reveal something more fragile.

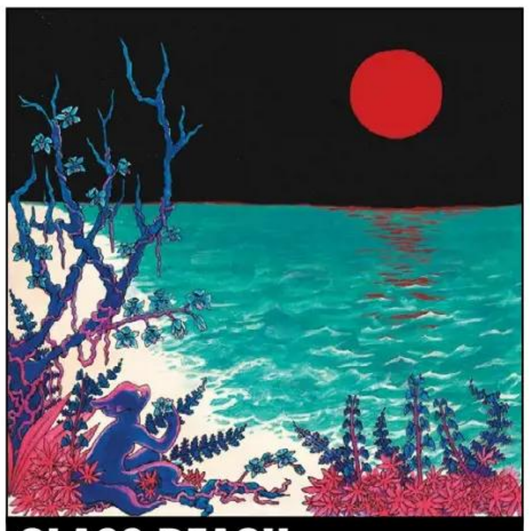
The late Lil Peep: emo-rap superstar



Static Dress: an exhilaratingly dynamic ride.

PRESS

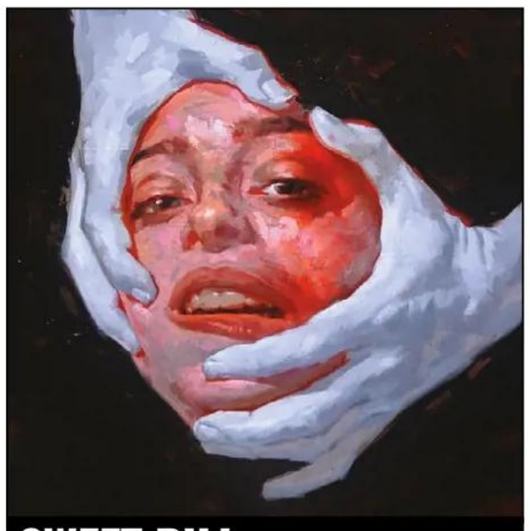
LEFT: SWAN GALLET/WWD/PENSKE MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES



GLASS BEACH

The First Glass Beach Album (2019)

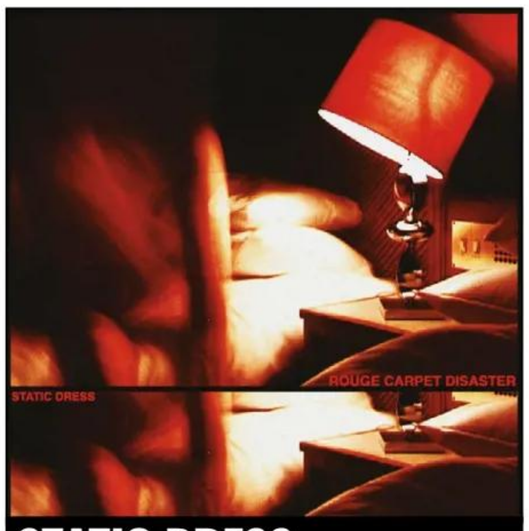
Glass Beach's debut album is a barrage of maximalism, delivering flurries of neo-psychedelia, fluttering electronica and art-rock ambience. The Seattle-based band embrace the surreal, from *Bedroom Community*'s frenetic, jazz-tinged electro-punk to the Midwest emo-wirh-synths mash-up of *Dallas* via the eclectic pop-punk bounce of *Cold Weather*. Bustling with dynamic riffs and abstract synth-pop, its creatively free post-emo sheen helped push the genre into its fifth wave.



SWEET PILL

Where The Heart Is (2022)

Sweet Pill are exactly that – a sharp, sugary hit of sophisticated math rock. *Where The Heart Is* is a masterful exploration of modern emo, delivering everything from clenched-heart sincerity to twinkling pop-punk. Singer Zayna Youssef is a star, whether tackling a stripped back instrumental number like *Diamond Eyes* or navigating the eclectic, twiddling riffing of the title track with barely-contained rage. A confident example of mathy emo, as conflicted as the emotions it strives to understand.



STATIC DRESS

Rouge Carpet Disaster (2022)

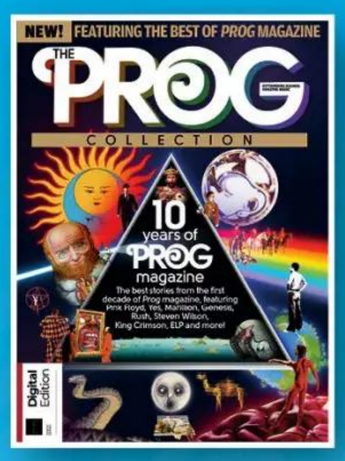
Pulsing with conviction and angst, the debut album from the UK's Static Dress is a turbulent assault on the senses. From the initial kick of shrieking opener *fleahouse* to the feral, cut-throat onslaught of *Courtney, just relax*, the four-piece's sound is corrosive, gripping you by the throat as blown-out distortion and poignant poetics scrape their way under your skin. Amid the guttural melodrama, the group traverse a degree of sonic realms, making *Rouge Carpet Disaster* an exhilaratingly dynamic ride.

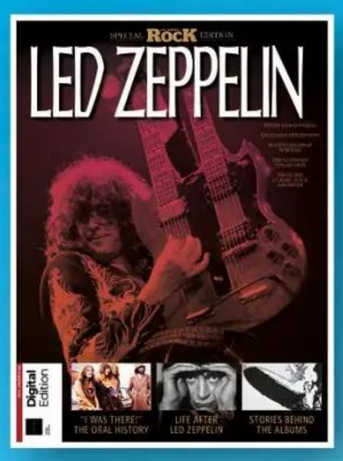
100 GECS

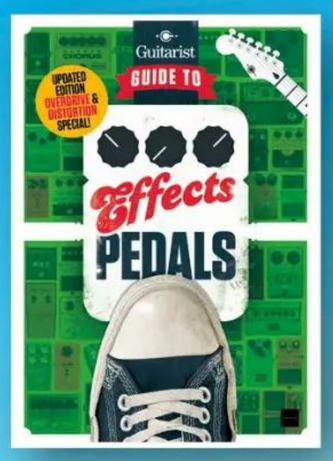
10,000 gecs (2023)

Sure. *10,000 gecs* is ridiculous, dizzying hyperpop. But while the second album from St Louis duo Dylan Brady and Laura Les is a world away from emo's traditional 'authenticity', it certainly plugs into to the alt scene's sound, sprinkling recognisable sonics into its boundary-less rampage. *Hollywood Baby* is a wallop of pop-punk riffs and fuzzy emo rap cynicism, while *Billy Knows Jamie* is almost *nu*-nu-metal, a quirky reimagining of Limp Bizkit if they were absolutely off their rockers.

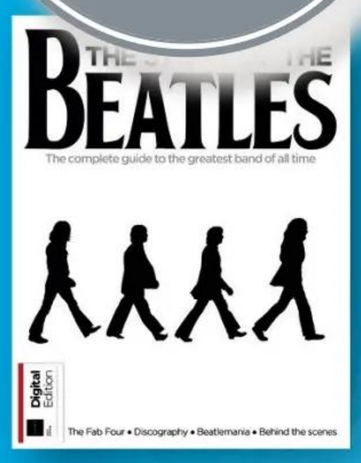
Chart the rise of Queen, from their early years to international stardom

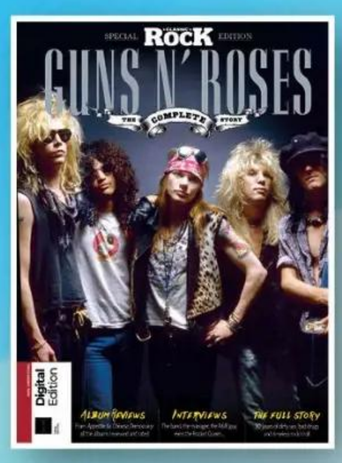


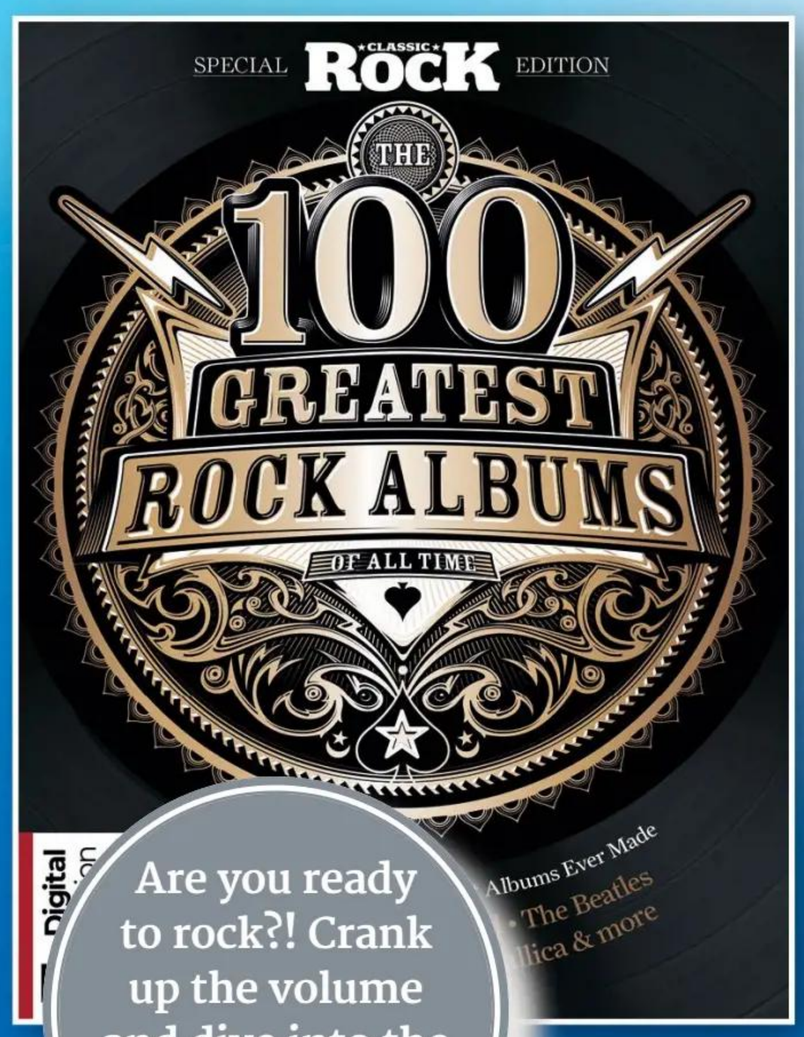




Dive into the history of nu metal, with the bands who were there







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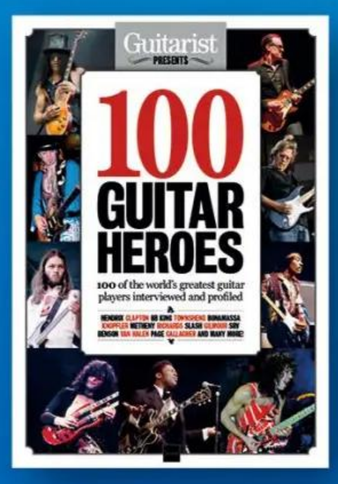

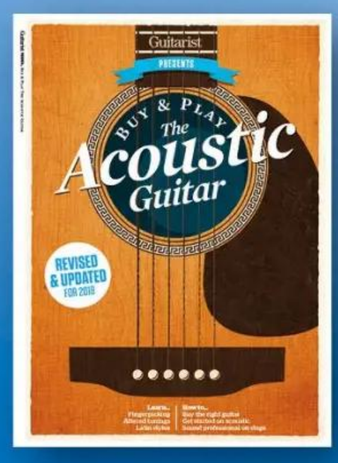

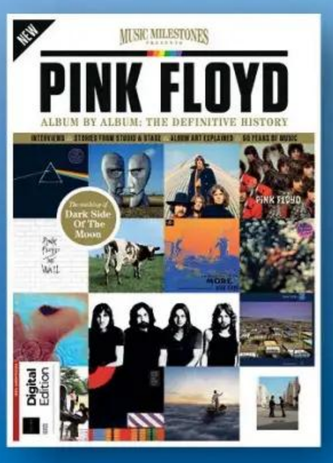

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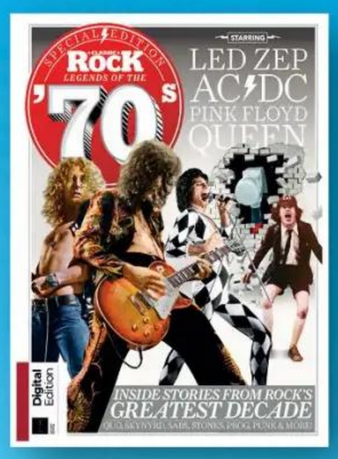
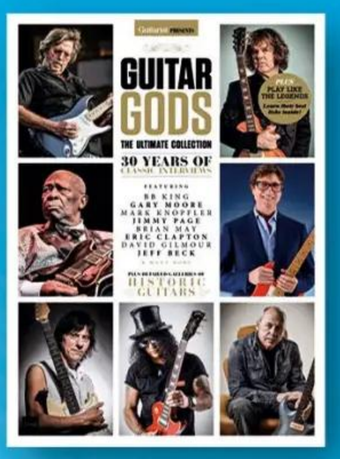
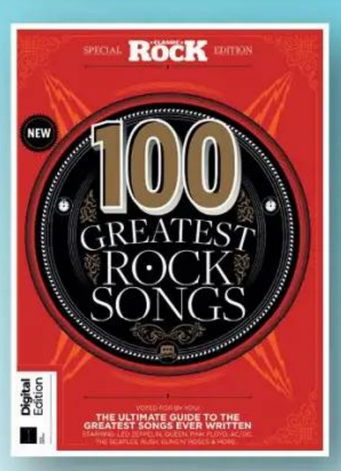
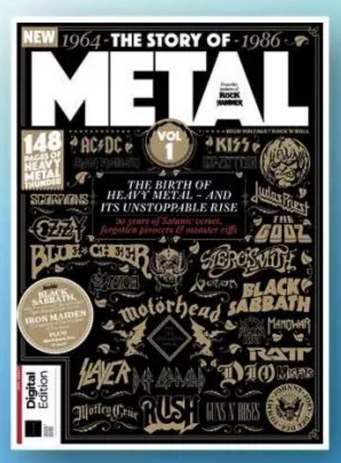


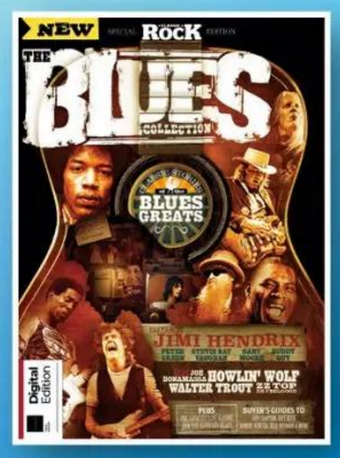


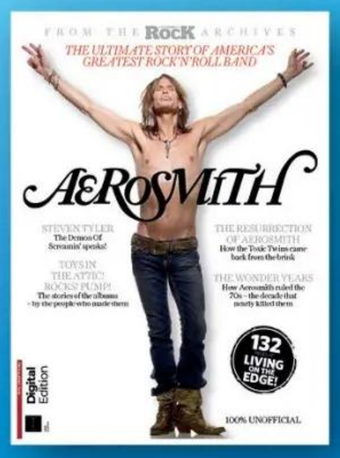


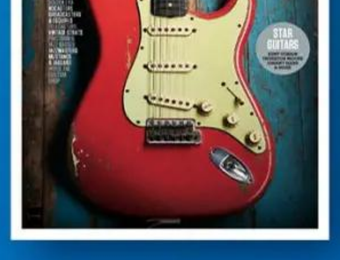
ROCK ON WITH OUR MUSIC BOOKAZINES

Discover the origins of legendary songs, relive iconic performances and meet the pioneers behind some of music's greatest names

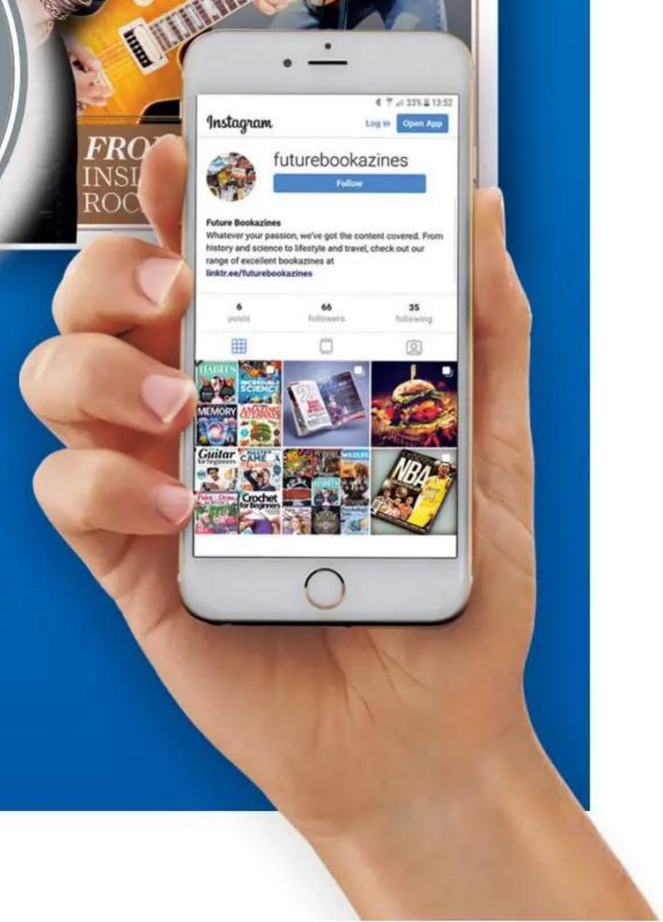








Tune into the finest hits of the 80s and explore a pivotal decade for music



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